METAL HAMMER
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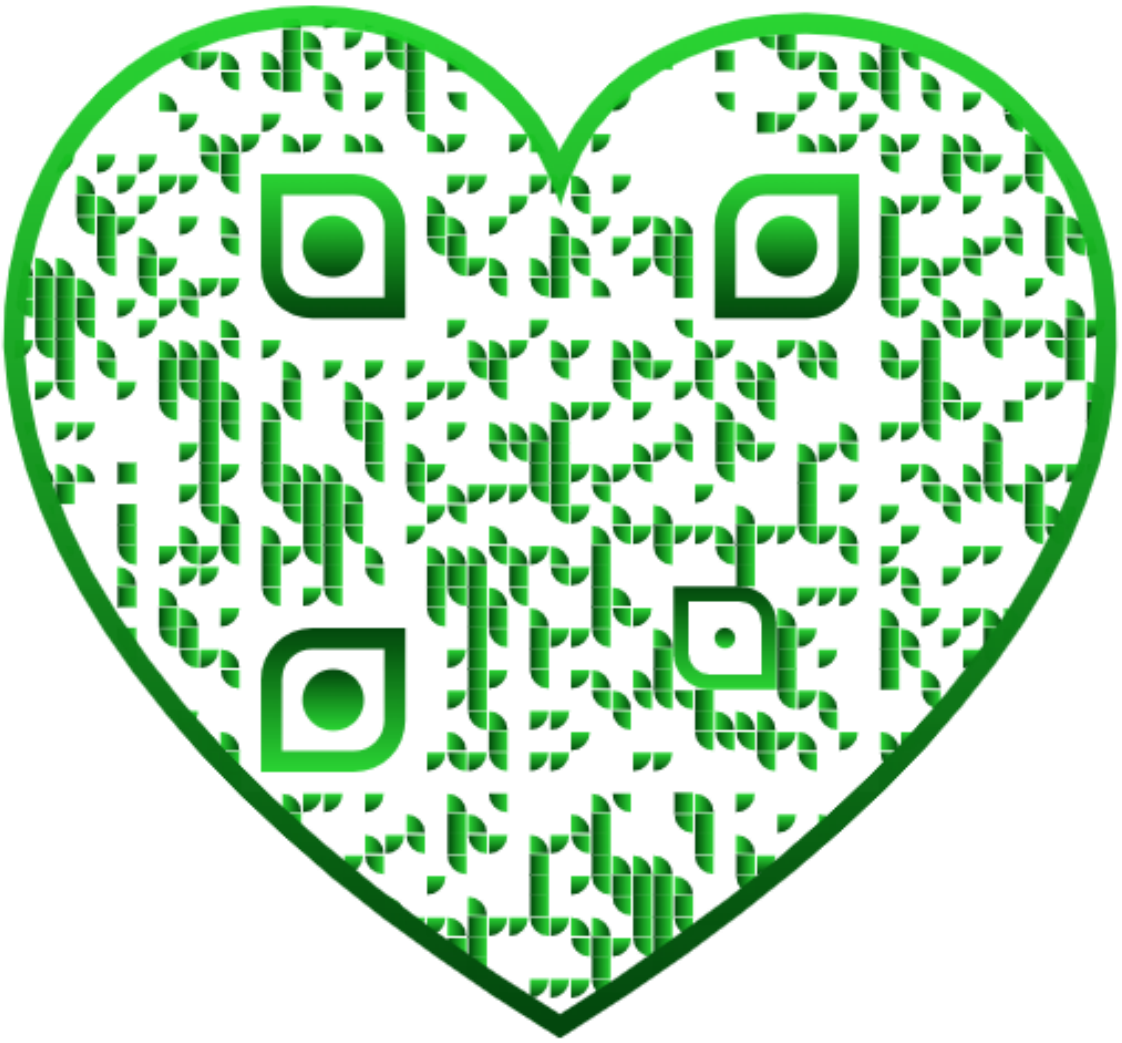
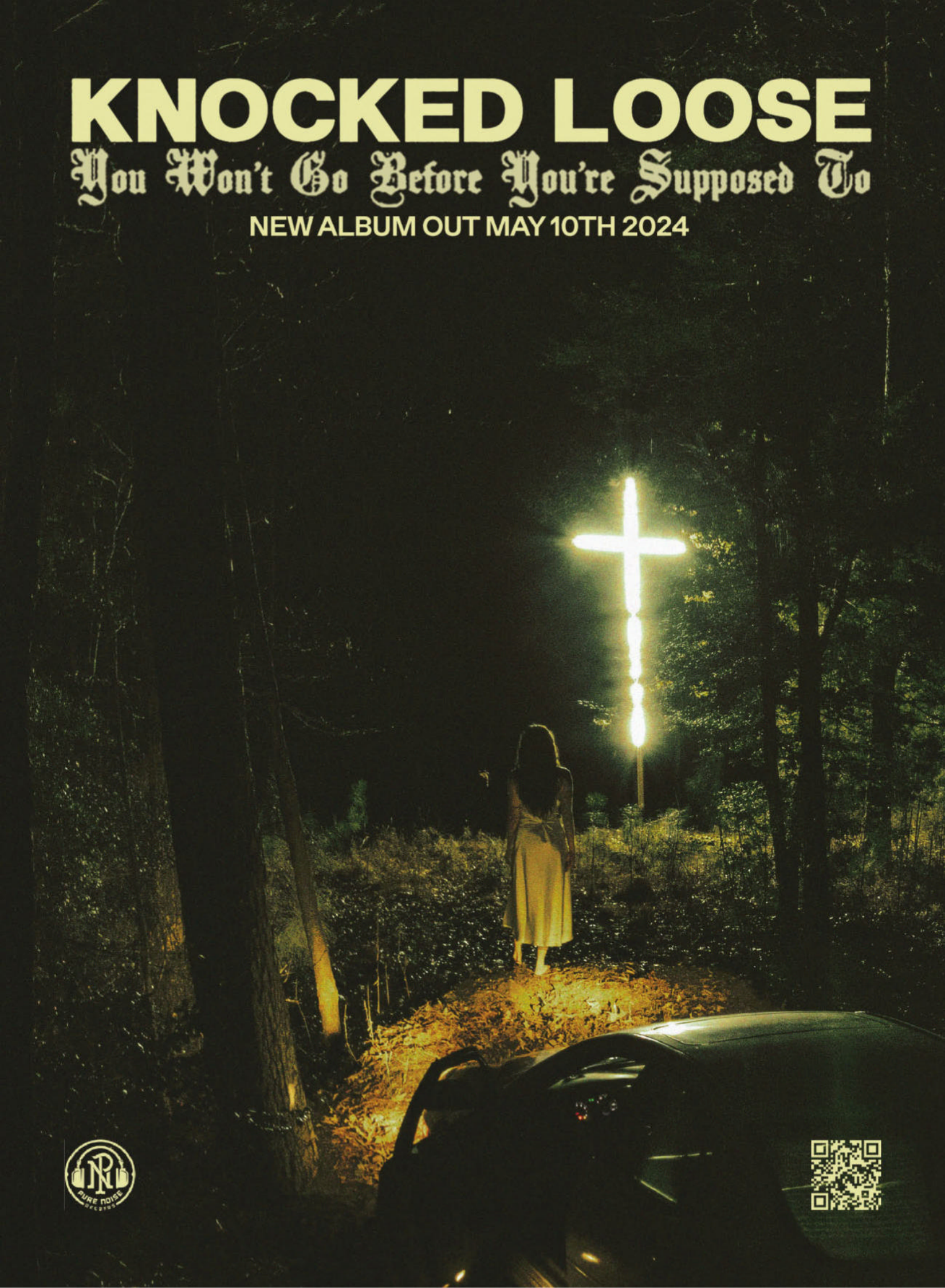
AND MORE!



KNOCKED LOOSE

You Won't Go Before You're Supposed To

NEW ALBUM OUT MAY 10TH 2024



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LONG LIVE THE KING

IN NOVEMBER 2019, Kerry King found himself out of a job. The band he'd co-founded and spent the last 38 years pouring himself into had ended, through no fault or decision of his own. But this is *the* Kerry King we're talking about. And as the excellent Paul Brannigan explains in his interview with the guitarist on p.34, Kerry had already started plotting his next moves when he realised the writing was on the wall for Slayer, because it was unthinkable to be Kerry King and not making metal. That's what he does.

Solo album *From Hell I Rise* is a clear, visceral, statement of intent. That it's now being released in the wake of the shock news about Slayer's live reunion this year in no way diminishes its power. We simply have the same version of King across two bands. As he tells it, he's "not finished being me". And thank Satan for that.

Elsewhere in the issue, Sharon den Adel reports from Kyiv, where she was filming a music video for Within Temptation's new anti-war single, *A Fool's Parade*. Despite the air alerts and devastation, she met people with remarkable resilience. As Ukrainian guest singer Alex Yarmak says, the most important thing now is to "not stop talking about Ukraine".

Stay metal,

ELEANOR GOODMAN
EDITOR
@ELEANORGOODMAN

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SCAN TO GET OUR WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

MEET THE BAND

PAUL BRANNIGAN
WRITER
Paul first met Kerry King backstage at a Slayer gig at Belfast's Ulster Hall on November 7, 1994 and last shared a beer with him when the 'Big 4' played together for the first time on June 16, 2010 in Poland. Who better to write our 'Double K' cover feature?

JEREMY SAFFER
PHOTOGRAPHER
The horror-loving, moustachioed Jeremy is currently celebrating his 20th year as a metal portrait photographer, and has shot more than 1,000 bands. Phew! This issue, we sent him to San Diego to eat delicious tacos and bro-down with P.O.D.

HANNAH MAY KILROY
WRITER
This month, Hannah spoke to Witch Club Satan – the theatrical, feminist black metal trio mentored by Mayhem's Necrobutcher. When she's not being kvlt, you'll find her cuddling dogs or samba dancing along the Brighton seafront. Hails!

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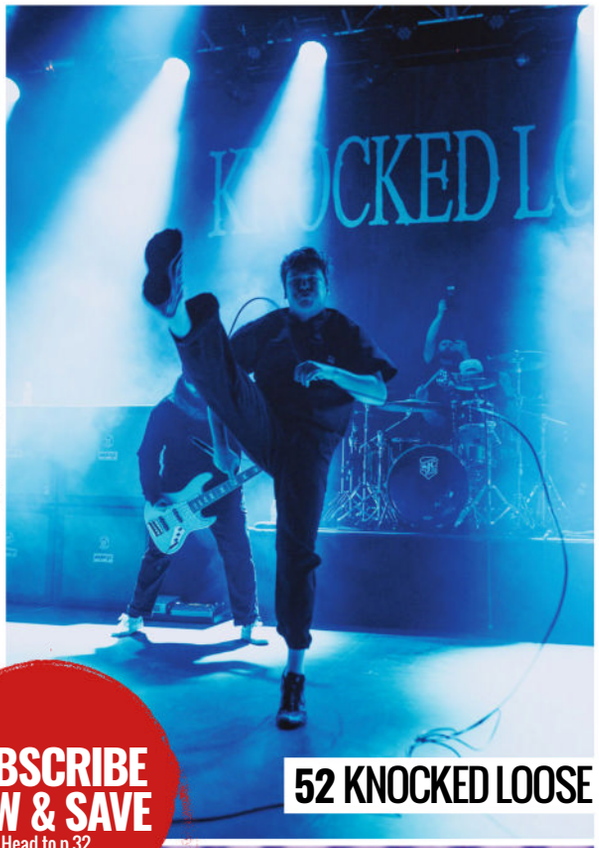

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THE JUICE IS LOOSE

IT'S OFFICIAL – AFTER 36 years, we're finally getting a *Beetlejuice* sequel! Director Tim Burton is reuniting with original stars Michael Keaton, Winona Ryder and Catherine O'Hara for a follow-up to his 1986 horror fantasy hit.

Titled *Beetlejuice Beetlejuice*, plot details are still fairly scant at the time of writing, but in March a teaser trailer got fans excited for the release. In less than 80 seconds' worth of footage, we're reintroduced to Deetz family members Lydia (Ryder) and Delia (O'Hara), as well as newcomer Astrid – portrayed by *Wednesday* star Jenna Ortega – who are attending a funeral, before Keaton's Betelgeuse makes a suitably dramatic return as the ghost with the most, having been banished to the realm of the dead in the original.

A sequel to *Beetlejuice* has been considered since as early as 1990 – when the idea 'Beetlejuice Goes Hawaiian' was announced – but was stuck in development limbo until 2022, when the film officially entered pre-production. With Danny Elfman also returning to compose the soundtrack, *Beetlejuice Beetlejuice* is set for release on September 6, 2024 via Warner Bros.

THE HOT TOPIC

EUROVISION GOES ...OUIJA-POP?

Ireland's Bambie Thug and Norway's Gåte are the latest metal-friendly acts to hit the song contest, giving a boost to the alternative scene

WORDS: EMILY SWINGLE

POWERED BY SEQUINS, glitter and cheese, Eurovision once felt like the antithesis of metal – but that's all changing. Over the past two decades, the annual song contest has warmed up to the heavier side of life.

In 2006, Finnish monster-men Lordi bagged the win with *Hard Rock Hallelujah*, their pyro-enhanced performance serving as a watershed moment for metal in the competition. It opened the floodgates for the likes of string-loving Finns Apocalyptica to join in, along with their countrymen The Rasmus, while Italian glam-rockers Måneskin even took the crown in 2021. Last year, Australia's synth-happy prog-metallers Voyager and German industrial-glam goths Lord Of The Lost participated in the final, held in Liverpool.

This year's competition, in Malmö, Sweden, is set to welcome even more alternative acts, pushing the boundaries for what alternative music can look and sound like in 2024. San Marino's entry, Megara, will be raising a defiant middle-finger with their flamenco-infused rock anthem, *11:11*. Elsewhere, Norway's Gåte are a Nordic folk group in the vein of Wardruna and Heilung, who are offering a modern interpretation of a 1,000-year-old medieval Scandinavian ballad with *Ulveham*.

Irish nu gen star Bambie Thug is also set to challenge public perceptions – not only when it comes to music and image, but to the gothic subculture as a whole.

"I don't think goths get enough of a spotlight," says Bambie. "Just like with metal, the public love to assume we're Satanists, or say my track would be so much better without the screaming."

Bambie has coined the term 'ouija-pop' to describe their music, and their entry, *Doomsday Blue* – taken from their 2023 EP, *Cathexis* – combines the grit of industrial torment with a feather-light, alt pop sheen.

"I think it highlights a lot of different facets of my sound," Bambie explains. "It's like a three-minute burst of musical theatre with separate acts."

With their glam outfits and elaborate make-up looks, Bambie is the perfect fit for Eurovision – loads of children have already fallen in love with them, considering them to be a living, breathing goth-Barbie.

"I keep getting sent videos of kids dressed up in my make-up, or toddlers dancing along to *Doomsday Blue*," the singer laughs.

For the sake of their younger fans, Bambie even made sure the music video wasn't too scary.

"We tried to make the monster look a bit more kind," Bambie smiles. "He's a lot less demonic and gory than when I first envisioned him."

Alongside their youthful fans, Bambie has been championed by the drag and queer community, as Ireland's first non-binary participant in the competition.

"I think me and Nemo, this year's Switzerland entry, are the first people to enter Eurovision while identifying as non-binary," they explain.

Lots of national support has been thrown Bambie's way, including praise from Ireland's 2022 entrant, Brooke Scullion. But while BBC commentator Graham Norton is from Bambie's home county of Cork, they aren't expecting any preferential treatment.

"If Graham Norton ripped into me, I would totally respect it," they say with a chuckle. "But I'm hoping that he'll be kind – Cork solidarity."

"IF GRAHAM NORTON RIPPED INTO ME, I'D TOTALLY RESPECT IT"

BAMBIE THUG

Bambie Thug is looking forward to representing Ireland and the non-binary community

PRESS/LILY LYTTON

For all the backing they've received, there are always people who will question why any alternative act – explicitly metal or otherwise – would want to participate in Europe's biggest pop contest. Putting aside the fact that Eurovision gives artists a chance to reach scores of viewers around the world – in 2023, it reached 162 million viewers with record-breaking online engagement – it also serves as an amazing proving ground for up-and-coming acts.

Finland's Blind Channel know this all too well – they reached number six in the contest in 2021, and found their online streams and live audiences exploding afterwards. As vocalist Joel Hokka explains, Eurovision was just the challenge they needed. He fondly recalls the experience as an important "school", pushing them to become better performers, as well as earning them a record deal.

"The whole experience felt like a fairytale," he says. "We now know how to handle pressure more than many other bands. We've had over 200 million eyes on us – after that, almost any show feels like a nice picnic with friends!"

While not all metal acts have succeeded in Eurovision – Lord Of The Lost came last in 2023 – Bambie is going into the competition with their head held high, quietly hopeful that they'll impress.

"I'd love to win, obviously," they laugh. "But just being seen by so many people will be amazing. Knowing I've got the support of my country is going to make it a lot less scary."

"Honestly, I feel ready," Bambie concludes. "It's going to be an honour to represent the alt scene and non-binary people on such a big stage. It's about time Eurovision represented the European population more accurately. Not everyone is a pop girlie who can do ballet, y'know?"

YOU CAN WATCH THE FINAL OF EUROVISION ON MAY 11 – SEE HTTPS://EUROVISION.TV FOR MORE INFO. BAMBIE THUG PLAYS DOWNLOAD THIS JUNE

HAMMER STEREO

What's been blowing our office speakers

KNOCKED LOOSE
You Won't Go Before You're Supposed To
"Twenty-five minutes of brutal brilliance"
ELEANOR GOODMAN
EDITOR

SELBST
Despondency Chord Progressions
"Cosmos-rupturing black metal from the deepest of personal wells"
JONATHAN SELZER
REVIEWS EDITOR

SEBASTIAN BACH
Child Within The Man
"As an old-school Skid Row fan, I love those unmistakeable pipes! Great album!"
VANESSA THORPE
PRODUCTION EDITOR

WHILE SHE SLEEPS
Self Hell
"Consistently outdoing themselves"
LOUISE BROCK
ART EDITOR

ARKA'N ASRAFOKOR
Dzikkuh
"African folk-infused groove metal that'll have you clattering imaginary drums"
RICH HOBSON
STAFF WRITER

FULL OF HELL
Coagulated Bliss
"Just when you thought extreme metal couldn't be twisted into new shapes, here's this"
DAVE EVERLEY
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

IF YOU AND JON BON JOVI FOUGHT NOW, WHO WOULD WIN?

Sebastian Bach faces down your questions on Skid Row, singing techniques and his seemingly endless supply of rock star beefs

WORDS: PAUL TRAVERS• PICTURES: JIM LOUVAU

AFTER A BRIEF stint in glam metal also-rans Madam X, Sebastian Bach shot to fame fronting Skid Row in the late 80s. Their first two albums were huge hits, but 1995's *Subhuman Race* was a relative flop and Sebastian was booted out of the band.

While Skid Row have continued with a string of different singers, Sebastian has flitted around the scene, with an on-off solo career running alongside numerous TV appearances and theatrical stints in Broadway and beyond. Now he's back with a slamming new solo album called *Child Within The Man* and is ready to answer your questions – including the inevitable ones about a possible Skid Row reunion and his several celebrity feuds…

What are your memories of working on *Subhuman Race*?
Stephen Swender, Facebook
"We were very excited to work with Bob Rock because we loved all of his records, and especially *Dr. Feelgood* by Mötley Crüe. But this was 1994 and all Bob could talk about was Veruca Salt [Rock produced that band's second album in 1997]. We didn't give a fuck about Veruca Salt! He was trying to make one kind of record and we were trying to make a different one. I saw this article saying Metallica's [Bob Rock-produced] *St. Anger* had the worst fucking drum sound in the history of drums. They traced back the snare sound of *St. Anger* to the snare sound of *Subhuman Race*. And it's true."

You're putting together a touring band and can pick anyone from any era, alive or dead. Who do you pick?
Guitar Garage, X/Twitter
"On drums I would have Neil Peart from Rush for sure. On bass, Michael Anthony, 'cos I love the spirit of Van Halen and I also love his backing vocals – it's out of this world how high he can sing. The first guy that comes to mind on guitar is Randy Rhoads, because he did not get to make enough music. He only made a couple records and that's a very sad situation."

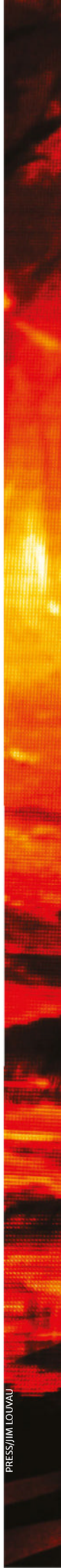
Have you seen Bubbles, Ricky and Julian recently? [Helpful Ed's note: Sebastian appeared in the Canadian sitcom *Trailer Park Boys*, featuring these characters.]
Ross Harris, Facebook
"Ha ha ha! That show is so huge in Canada that I can't walk down the street without people freaking out about the *Trailer Park Boys*. I will add that those guys are so talented, and if you think that their TV show is incredible, you should go see them live. They're natural born showmen and they're funny as hell. I love them."

What inspired your new album?
Bachfan20, X/Twitter
"My vinyl collection. I tried as hard as I could to make an album in 2024 that feels like an album from the 70s. I enlisted Elvis Baskette, who's produced Wolfgang Van Halen, Slash and Alter Bridge, and I got Robert Ludwig, who unbelievably mastered *Led Zeppelin II*, *Kiss Alive!* and so many more. He's since retired, so my album was one of the last ones he ever did. My father painted the cover – the painting had been rolled up in a tube since 1978!"

Would you ever consider re-recording the early Skid Row demos like *Edge Of The Night* or *Walk With A Stranger*?
Aaron Dean, Facebook
"No. They weren't put on records for a reason. That said, one of our biggest songs early on in Skid Row, which we used to open up our show in the clubs, was called *Forever*. It was one of my favourites, but I got outvoted about putting it out on the first album."

Will you ever do a sing-off with Chris Jericho?
Callum Jones, email
"The better question would be, will he do a wrestle-off with Sebastian Bach? Because I'm as much of a wrestler as he is a singer."

Would you ever make peace with Ronnie Radke?
Rachel Appleby, Facebook
"I don't know who that is. The only way I know that name is from the internet, so they might as well be a Republican politician or a reality TV show star or YouTuber. Whatever opinion someone has on the internet, for me to give a shit, I would have to respect their music first. And I have never heard one note of that band [Falling In


PRESS/JIM LOUVAU

Sebastian is still a massive fanboy of rock's legends

"THEY TRACED THE SNARE SOUND OF *ST. ANGER* BACK TO THE SNARES OF *SUBHUMAN RACE*"

The Youth Gone Wild

Reverse]. The only reason I know them is because they seem to love their computers more than real rock'n'roll."

If you could go back to the mid-90s, what would you change?
Justlookin68, X/Twitter
"I would change the outfit that I wore at Donington in 1995. Those grey shorts with the orange Converse running shoes that came up halfway up my ankle. I was trying to be like a skateboarder, which I'm not."

If you and Jon Bon Jovi would fight now, who would win? [According to Sebastian's autobiography, they had an altercation on tour in the 80s.]
Liro Pirinen, Facebook
"Well, we're not fighters, we're musicians, so that doesn't make sense. What I will say is, can you imagine a tour with Bon Jovi reuniting with Richie Sambora and the reunited Skid Row as an opener? We could take that around the world as many times as Guns N' Roses did. I mean, maybe not *quite* that many times, but it would be a big draw."

***Hammer*: Have you run into each other since your infamous beef?**
"When I opened up for Guns N' Roses at Wembley [in 2006], me and Axl Rose were staying at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel in London. We were having dinner and the waitress said, 'Hey, there's somebody in the corner who wants to say hi.' It was Jon Bon Jovi and I had a couple of glasses of wine in me so I just stood up and walked over. Jon looked at me with a look like, 'Are you going to be a fucking dick? Are you going to be cool?' and I just said, 'Hey, dude, how's it going?' We had a long ride together with a lot of success and there's a lot of great memories, despite what the internet will tell you. So I invited him over to our table and me, Jon and Axl had a great night, inhaling red wine and reminiscing."

How did you practise the higher-pitched notes?
Jarod Valverde, Facebook
"I have to give credit where credit is due because Jon Bon Jovi, back when I first joined Skid Row, put me put me in touch with his personal vocal coach. Because as he will tell you, especially now, there's a big difference between singing at the weekend and playing every single night and not losing your voice. I practise using an Italian vocal scale called bel canto. It's very tedious, but it changes your vocal cords. You can hear the screams on my new record and I'm an old man now, so there must be something to be said for it!"

"I'M AS MUCH OF A WRESTLER AS CHRIS JERICHO IS A SINGER"

You've shared a stage with just about everybody, but who remains on your bucket list?
Maxybyrne, X/Twitter
"I am such a fan of rock music, just like anybody that reads *Metal Hammer*, and I get a very hard psychological tic in my brain when I'm hanging out with somebody like Geezer Butler or Geddy Lee or Gene Simmons – anybody whose fan club that I joined when I was 12. There's a voice in my brain saying, 'This cannot be real!' I don't know if other musicians sell a million records and then they feel like they belong at a dinner table with AC/DC. But when you say to me, who would you like to play with – it's still those goofballs known as Skid Row, because I think the fans deserve that."

Do you have unfinished business with Skid Row?
Kbone W Rokker, Facebook
"When we started that band and we sold millions of albums and toured the world, I, in my naive brain, never thought we'd break up and throw it all away. For me, doing three albums with Skid Row, I was just getting started. I didn't think it would be over and done with so quick. So I just do the same thing that I do with my solo career that I did in 1988. I have a different band, but that doesn't change what I do at all. I'm the same Sebastian, I'm just 100 years old now!"

***Hammer*: Can you see that reunion ever actually happening?**
"I can definitely see that happening considering they play the same songs I play. So for a fan, they're probably wondering, 'What's wrong with these guys, that they can't put their egos aside and do something for the fans?' When I get a substantial royalty check for an album I did with musicians that I haven't been in the same room with since 1996, I feel like a piece of shit. Because we should be giving something back to the fans that have made this great life possible." H

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PRESS/JIM LOUVAU

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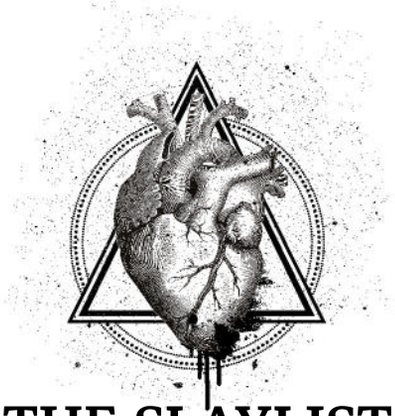

THE SLAYLIST

EMMA BOSTER

From bruising hardcore to country and rap, these songs have shaped Dying Wish's firebrand vocalist

WORDS: WILL MARSHALL

Emma is aaaaall about album closers

LISTEN NOW
To hear Emma's picks, head to tinyurl.com/EmmaBoster Slaylist

"I HEARD THE band **HAVE HEART**, and it was a defining moment for me. The song *Bostons* inspired our song *Fragments Of A Better Memory* – especially the bridge and the hook into the end breakdown, and the 'I despise the drinking father' aspect [*Bostons* features the lyric, '*just a broken old man broken by the whiskey*']. When I was a kid, that song resonated with me because of what I was going through [with my alcoholic stepfather].

"I love *Rock Steady* by **NO DOUBT**! I've listened to No Doubt since I was seven – my mom was a huge indie rock kid. When we drove to my grandparents' house three hours away, *Rock Steady* was one of the CDs we would have on repeat. It was the first time I'd ever heard a woman in a rock band, and Gwen Stefani is such an icon.

"**KILLSWITCH ENGAGE**'s *Rose Of Sharyn* is kind of a memoir, and it was pretty unique for bands at that time to write the way they did about the topic of grief, Howard Jones singing his heart out the way he did. The first time I ever heard them, I was 13, and it was on *Guitar Hero III*, but I didn't properly appreciate them until six or seven years ago.

"I had this roommate when I was 18 or 19; she disappeared completely, left half her belongings, and we never heard from her again. But she left **TYPE O NEGATIVE**'s *October Rust* on CD, and I kind of inherited it. I remember hearing the intro to *Love You To Death*, the piano lead into Peter Steele's really sultry voice, and I had an out-of-body experience. It was one of the first times I realised metal can bend, and it can be whatever you want it to be.

"**100 DEMONS** are one of Dying Wish's biggest influences, and *Dying In My Own Arms* especially is really influential. I saw [former vocalist] Bruce LePage write on Twitter, 'I'm not anyone special, just a junkie who wrote some songs you like.' That's so real. I'm no different to anyone else in the room, I firmly believe in that.

"*A Call For Blood* is my favourite **HATEBREED** song. It's about killing someone who caused a lot of bodily harm to a woman. Jamey [Jasta, vocals] has talked a lot about how he was brought up, it's part of the puzzle you can put together, and I really like that. They have a formula, and this is a prime example of how that's followed.

"I was struggling so much when I was younger, and it felt like **SZA** wrote songs specifically for me. *Broken Clocks*, specifically, has the line *'nothin' but love'*, and that's really challenged me. I grew up such an angry kid, and I feel like it had a lot to do with the downfall in areas of my life. Hearing how sad she was, how much she didn't love herself, was pained by others… but at the end it's nothing but love. That changed the way that I walk in life.

"It was hard to pick just one song by **KENDRICK LAMAR**, but the *Good Kid, M.A.A.D City* album changed my life. It's the best concept record ever made, and he's one of the best rappers alive. *Money Trees* especially does not miss any beats. I saw him in LA and it was just unreal.

"I love **KACEY MUSGRAVES** so much. I have a real thing for album closers, and *Rainbow* is such a happy and sad song together. She's a massive queer icon; gay people don't get a lot of representation in country music, and she's at the forefront of changing that. I grew up listening to some country, and moving to Nashville helped me learn to love it so much.

"**ETHEL CAIN**'s *Thoroughfare* tells an incredible story, and it's one of the only songs on the album *Preacher's Daughter* I can listen to without crying. I'm such a sucker for a coming-of-age story, and it's about living in the moment more than anything, where she's hitchhiking across the country and discovers that love is what she and this guy driving her had the whole time." H

"I HAD AN OUT-OF-BODY EXPERIENCE LISTENING TO TYPE O NEGATIVE"

***SYMPTOMS OF SURVIVAL* IS OUT NOW. DYING WISH PLAY DOWNLOAD FESTIVAL IN JUNE**

PRESS

IN THE STUDIO

PAIN

Peter Tägtgren's industrial metallers are ready to hit the dancefloor like it's 1999

WORDS: RICH HOBSON • PICTURES: IRINA PANOVA

Peter Tägtgren is once again ready to bring the Pain!

PETER TÄGTGREN IS a busy boy. Frontman of Hypocrisy, Peter was also half of Lindemann until 2020 and is a prolific producer, working out of his Swedish studio, The Abyss. So it's little wonder that he's hardly had time for his industrial metal side-project, Pain, since their last album, 2016's *Coming Home*. But with standalone single *Party In My Head* in 2021 and a tour in October 2023, Peter's brought the band back to life with a fresh zeal for club-ready metal anthems. *Hammer* were invited to listen to an early demo of new album *I Am* – and if this is just the *demo*, there's a lot to be excited about.

It's been eight years since the last Pain record – what happened?
Peter: "Lindemann albums, Hypocrisy albums, a Joe Lynn Turner album and a fuck-ton of touring! I had three bands at one point, and all three were going on tour, which meant a lot of planning. That kills a lot of creativity."

The record's opening line is *'Someone's watching me'* and in the track *The New Norm* you say *'Trust No one'*... Is this a paranoid, dystopian record?
"Not really! It's more saying, 'Take care of yourself, fuck everyone else!' People are more interested in their phones even as a war breaks out around them, so it feels like society is getting more selfish. That's what the new normal is."

Given how long you've been away, were you looking to try something new stylistically?
"I think it's cool to mix all kinds of eras. I don't want to just call it 'nu metal', but we've definitely got one foot in there and one foot in the 80s, too. I'm a huge fan of Depeche Mode when they got super-dark, around *Music For The Masses*. There's so many good bands now too – Carpenter Brut are fuckin' killer and that's a newer generation of the electronic stuff, so we want to explore elements of that too."

With so many synth-driven bands in the metal world now, does it feel like the ideal time for Pain to come back?
"Kind of! We actually tried to do a tour with Carpenter Brut, but just couldn't line up the schedules, unfortunately. We could basically go out with whoever these days, though – we could go out with Bring Me The Horizon! We want to get out to all kinds of audiences."

THE FACTS

ALBUM:
9

STUDIO:
The Abyss, Sweden

PRODUCER:
Peter Tägtgren

EXPECT:
Massive, dancefloor-filling metal with impossibly catchy hooks

PRESS/IRINA PANOVA

***Party In My Head* was released in 2021. Why let it out so far ahead of the album?**
"Sometimes when you get shit in your head, you've just gotta let it out! Everybody felt it was a great song, and it was perfect for that mood when everybody was itching to get back out from lockdown. I basically wrote how I felt, and I think a lot of people felt similarly trapped. It started slow, but it got its own life in the end, a bit like [Pain hit] *Shut Your Mouth*."

Last year you did the I Am tour, which is also the title of the record. What does it mean?
"I Am can be a lot of things – we are all *something*. It's whatever means something to you. I wrote the song about a time when I was sitting with somebody as they died, this really brutal experience, especially when they were very close to you."

You've produced all of Pain's records. Could you ever see yourself bringing in another producer?
"The problem is, I tend to produce while I write. That means what you've heard is basically a demo that I'd then take to a producer, and they'd then want to rip it apart and put it back together again. I'm not sure I want to go through that!"

This year marks 25 years since Pain's breakthrough. How do you feel looking back on it?
"Why do I keep on going?! Ha ha ha! Music is therapy for me and it doesn't matter if people love it or hate it, I *need* to create. I haven't had a real job since, like, '92, so I'm really thankful that people still support us." H

***I AM* IS OUT ON MAY 17 VIA NUCLEAR BLAST**

LIFE LESSONS

LZZY HALE

The Halestorm icon talks discovering music through Hanson, Devil worship, and how she'd love to make the jump to the big screen

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS

WHEN WE CATCH up with Lzzy Hale, she's sitting in her closet. "I'm adulting and I don't like it," the Halestorm vocalist and guitarist tells us, midway through house renovations and surrounded by leather jackets and stage outfits, although it's an apt setting for us to look back on her life.

Since founding the band with her brother, drummer Arejay, in 1997 aged just 13, she's led Halestorm through a series of changes and leaps of faith that have turned them into one of the biggest bands in hard rock, and Lzzy into an empowering modern icon. This is what she's learned along the way.

REVISITING THE PAST CAN HELP YOU MOVE FORWARD

"To recreate our set for this last festival season in the UK and Europe, we went back to a couple of songs on [2009 debut] *Halestorm*, just to kind of go back to basics. It's crazy to see or to hear in real time how much we've grown, how different my voice sounds.I couldn't help myself analysing little tricks that I did with my voice, and I'm like, 'Oh,I wouldn't do that now.' Particular soundson the record take you back to that moment. When I hear certain guitar bars, I'm like, 'Oh, man, do you remember that carpet that was in the studio?'"

DON'T BE AFRAID TO STEP OUT OF THE BOX

"When we first started, we were playing with both pop-punk bands and metal bands. It was this weird, middle-of-the-road in-between, and I always felt a little discouraged by that, because I was like, 'Well, where's our place? Where do we belong?' Those things mattered to me in the beginning, because I really wanted to figure it out. I wanted to know who I was. And looking back on it, I'm so glad that we didn't adhere to that. It really just comes down to, are you passionate or not? Is it good or not? Finding our place doesn't really matter."

NOT EVERY GIG WILL BE EASY

"If I'm putting myself in an uncomfortable situation where I don't know the outcome, there's something physical that happens to my body. You have something to prove. When we played Lollapalooza in Sweden, we were opening up for Billie Eilish, and we were the only hard rock band on the line-up. The crowd was very enthusiastic, but it took them a second. The full first two songs were just everybody in shock and awe, staring and absorbing what we were doing… then we had them after that. It was so awesome seeing all of these kids in Drake t-shirts throwing the horns."

STAY COOL IN THE HEAT AT FESTIVALS

"Small bit of advice. Put your leather jacket in the refrigerator for, like, 20 minutes before you have to do anything strenuous or sweaty."

COMING OUT AS BISEXUAL HELPED ME CONNECT WITH FANS

"On Twitter, I was asked a question and I responded, 'Well, being bi…' and then everybody kind of freaked out. At that point in time, my bandmates and my parents and everybody kind of knew, so I was in my own bubble, and didn't realise that the majority of people out there, 95%, had no idea. I was like, 'Oh, well, OK, I guess I'll have to be prepared to answer for that now.' I do keep some things for myself, that's the healthy way to do things, but I don't mind being open about the things that I like being open about. And this, specifically, has brought me joy by talking about it. I get these amazing hugs from young people that come to our shows and they're trying to come out to their parents or they're afraid to. And I'm in a place in my life now where I can talk openly about all of these things and give something back."

"TAYLOR HANSON PROBABLY STARTED MY WHOLE BI THING"

YOU'D NEVER GUESS ONE OF OUR EARLY INSPIRATIONS

"My brother and I were watching *Saturday Night Live* in 1997 and we see [90s pop trio] Hanson come up and do this ridiculous song [alt pop oddity *MMMBop*]. We were like, 'We need to know who they are, because they're our age. How come *we're* not on there?' We had a lot of conflicts that happened when we first started a band. Most people were like, 'You're too young, you should be doing something else. Why are you going into hard rock? You're going to be worshipping the Devil.' So all of those things were happening, and then we saw these three brothers go up and do their song on a global scale, so we wanted to figure it out. If you go online and listen to us, pre being signed, you can hear some of those cues of how I'm doing the vocals, how I'm building a song, and all that is because I was studying [Hanson's debut album] *Middle Of Nowhere*. And also, I thought [Hanson singer] Taylor was cute, and it probably started my whole bi thing because it's like, 'Oh, he's pretty, but he's a dude.'"

ORGANISED RELIGION WASN'T RIGHT FOR ME…

"For a good while, we were involved in the Christian community, went to church every Sunday, and I went to a Christian school. Discovering rock was a pivotal moment for me, because I wasn't getting into rock music to worship the Devil or to be a rebel. It was something that I connected with in some unknown way, so I got obsessed with it. Family members, teachers, parents of friends, all noticed this change in me. And what frustrated me is that, instead of noticing that I'd had a change in character, as in maybe I was more confident, maybe I actually had an idea of what I wanted to do in life, and that being celebrated, the majority of those people were very concerned. That made me start questioning, 'Why is something that I love and that I am passionate about evil, just because you said so?'"

…BUT RELIGION GOT SOME THINGS RIGHT

"I've taken a lot of the things that I've learned from spirituality and from certain aspects of religion. The fundamental truths are: be kind to each other, love one another, always think about what you're doing to somebody else before you do things. And I told myself, 'I'm going to be the best person I can.' What these human beings were telling me was their perceived conception of spirituality, and the path they said I should take, I didn't agree with. But either way, through the amazing vehicle of hard rock and the Devil's music, or whatever you call it, I have made it part of my mission statement to spread that love and be a sanctuary for people." ▶

PRESS

Lzzy Hale: safe to say, her imposter syndrome is not justified!

"I HAVE BEEN IN A BODY BAG MORE TIMES THAN SOMEBODY LIVING SHOULD BE"

THE LITTLE MOMENTS MATTER

"I feel like there are so many small epiphanies and so many small moments that have changed my life for the better or worse. If my parents hadn't decided to move to the middle of nowhere in Pennsylvania, maybe my brother and I wouldn't be as close. If we hadn't had that, maybe we would have never connected on music."

EVERYTHING HAPPENS FOR A REASON

"Right before we met Joe [Hottinger, Halestorm guitarist and Lzzy's long-term partner] and Josh [Smith, bassist], we had just lost half our band all at once. Our former guitar player and bass player decided after a few years that this was too hard and they could make more money being in a cover band. I remember being distraught and turning to little bro [Arejay] and saying, 'Are we crazy for doing this? Because nobody understands it. Maybe we're not meant to do this.' And luckily, in my little brother's brilliance, he was like, 'Well, yeah, of course you're crazy. We both are absolutely nuts for doing this. But what else are we going to do?' And I'm glad we did, because shortly after that we met Joe, and then a year after that we met Josh, and we finally found our members."

REMIND YOURSELF OF YOUR ACHIEVEMENTS

"Sometimes I can hit walls and I can get depressed. I can have imposter syndrome, like, 'Why am I even doing this? Someone's going to find out that I'm just a dork from Pennsylvania.' I can have all these moments, and then there will inevitably be the epiphany: 'No, this is actually an amazing feat that you've accomplished, and you can take the next step if you want to.'"

YOU NEVER RUN OUT OF DREAMS

"I jump at the opportunity to do any acting. I've auditioned for a lot of things. Years ago, I got an acting agent, and then everything with the band took off. But you never know. I'm ready and willing if the opportunity to act puts itself on the table. I really like cheesy horror films. I do really well in a body bag, because we did that [in the music video for single *Back From The Dead*]. I have been in a body bag more times than somebody living should be."

HALESTORM'S LATEST ALBUM, *BACK FROM THE DEAD*, IS OUT NOW. THE BAND PLAY LOUDER THAN LIFE AND AFTERSHOCK THIS AUTUMN

PRESS

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THE STORY BEHIND

SILENCE SPEAKS WHILE SHE SLEEPS

How tragedy healed the rift between the DIY Sheffield crew and Bring Me The Horizon, resulting in a unifying British metalcore anthem

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS

While She Sleeps (left to right): Sean Long, Loz Taylor, Mat Welsh, Aaran Mckenzie, Adam Savage

PRESS/RYAN CHANG

EVERY BAND THAT makes it has that one album. That career-changing moment that propels them to the next level. And for While She Sleeps, it was their third release, 2017's *You Are We*. The Sheffield crew's promise had been clear all along. With 2010 EP *The North Stands For Nothing*, 2012's excellent debut, *This Is The Six*, and their criminally underrated second album, 2015's *Brainwashed*, they'd proved their belligerent, bruising metalcore could unite rooms and lungs. A juggernaut of a record that sounded purpose-built for arenas, *You Are We* was the sound of a band starting to test the boundaries of their sound, introducing a ton of melody into their punk-infused savagery, and constituted a massive step towards metal's upper echelons.

The album was written and recorded during a period of intense change for While She Sleeps. In 2015, they'd started renovating a 19th-century industrial warehouse in Sheffield's Kelham Island neighbourhood, building their own Six Audio studio and band HQ with their bare hands.

"We watched so much YouTube," remembers guitarist and vocalist Mat Welsh. "My partner would wake up at night and I'd be on my phone, watching Craig [Phillips] from *Big Brother* show me how to hang a door. She'd be like, 'What are you doing?' And it was always the most boring response of, 'I'm looking up how to fit UPVC windows.'"

Feeling like they didn't belong on their major label, Sony Music, Sleeps left to go it alone in 2016, and crowdfunded *You Are We* via the now-defunct PledgeMusic platform.

"We're from that part of the music scene where you go from fan to artist," adds vocalist Loz Taylor, who says the band relished the opportunity to take things back to a grassroots mentality. "We said, 'Why can't we just say to the audience, you give us a tenner and if everyone does that, we've got enough money to make the record and make all the videos?'"

"We smashed it. Like, we doubled the target," says Mat.

It was solid proof, after years of faltering momentum, that, in fact, there were a ton of people who cared about the band. "We were in the warehouse in the evenings watching people join the pledge, just buzzing. We were filled with this 'Fuck it, anything's possible' attitude."

In late September 2015, having already written a handful of tracks for *You Are We*, including singles *Civil Isolation* and *Hurricane*, While She Sleeps headed out on the road, supporting Bullet For My Valentine at a series of intimate UK venues. It was when the tour pulled into Bournemouth that Mat started writing the track that would become their career best: *Silence Speaks*, a monstrous Yorkshire love-in that would ultimately bring in Bring The Horizon's Oli Sykes as a guest vocalist.

"I wrote the *'Where is your heart? Can we beat this if we all / Tear the borders, break the walls'* section outside the bus," he says of the scene where he penned the song's unifying chorus. "There was a pavilion, it was proper seaside."

That sense of positivity and unity bleeds into *You Are We* as a whole, but perhaps no more than on *Silence Speaks*, which the duo say was an attempt to break the disconnection of modern society, most felt on the incendiary line: *'War will cease when we refuse to fight.'* In today's turbulent world, it's a lyric that feels more poignant than ever.

THE FACTS

RELEASED:
2017

ALBUM:
You Are We

PERSONNEL:
Loz Taylor (vocals), Sean Long (guitar/vocals), Mat Welsh (guitar/vocals), Aaran McKenzie (bass), Adam Savage (drums), Oli Sykes (vocals)

"I think we were almost trying to find a conclusion to the negativity," says Mat. "When Brexit happened, we were like, 'Fuck me, *Brainwashed* is so relevant now, because that whole thing happened because of media brainwashing. What do you do with that? How do we make something good out of this mess?'"

Immediately, they knew they had an anthem on their hands, but *Silence Speaks* can also be pinpointed as the moment While She Sleeps started to branch out stylistically.

"We were really trying to push the boundaries of what we were doing," says Mat. "We didn't care if something was different to what we'd done in the past. We were just letting everyone's ideas kind of flow and happen."

The track mashes together rapping, Alexisonfire-inspired post-hardcore, gang vocals, a spiralling solo from guitarist Sean Long and the classic elasticity of early metalcore, while Loz, who had undergone three throat surgeries at this point, was on the vocal form of his life. Meanwhile, Mat describes the song's *'The longer I live I learn that we don't belong'* bridge as a "total Backstreet Boys section".

The band may have released more experimental stuff since, but *Silence Sleeps* is the first example of While She Sleeps pulling off their now trademark party trick: chucking a million ideas at the wall and emerging with something that could only be them. But having Oli Sykes feature on the track was never the original plan – in fact, going into the process, bad blood between the two bands was rife. While Loz and Mat aren't keen to get into the specifics today, they've previously gone on record to blame the inter-band feud on "girl" troubles.

> **"WE DEDICATED THE RECORD TO TOM SEARLE"**
> MAT WELSH

"There was a bit of argy-bargy between us and Bring Me about some bits and bobs," Loz offers diplomatically. In the end, tragedy forced perspective on the situation. The loss of Architects' guitarist Tom Searle, who passed away in August 2016 following a three-year battle with cancer, brought into stark focus the futility of pointless beef.

"We dedicated the record to Tom," says Mat, who recalls how the two bands agreed to put their differences behind them after speaking for the first time in years at Tom's wake. "And after his funeral, anything petty just faded away. What's the point?'"

Having heard a few snippets of *Silence Speaks*, the BMTH vocalist offered to sing on the track as a way to cement the peace. And after

Preaching to the converted: While She Sleeps performing at St Pancras Old Church in London, September 4, 2017

sharing voice memos and ideas back and forth – it was Oli who came up with the idea to have the complete stop right before his *'I think the silence speaks volumes'* vocal – he joined Sleeps in the studio to record it.

"It's really weird when you have guests, because you want to let them do their thing, but they're doing their thing on *your* thing," smiles Mat, who reveals that, as Bring Me had dialled back the heaviness for a hooky, cleaner sound on 2015's *That's The Spirit*, Oli needed some… 'polite encouragement' to shake the cobwebs off his scream. "You need to pipe up if you want to change something. So we were like, 'Do you reckon we can do one a little bit harder…?'"

Oli also appeared in the song's video, which, in keeping with *You Are We*'s DIY spirit, was made at Sleeps' Sheffield warehouse. It was filmed and directed by Mat's brother, Tom Welsh, and editor Taylor Fawcett on sets built by the band themselves.

"At the end of that section with Oli in, Loz smashes the window, but at the same time, here's a secret door that someone pulls on a rope, so the camera went through the window at the same time," says Mat. "We also went up the road and pulled loads of branches off these bushes on this wasteland and made the forest scene. Then we had all this concrete on the floor so that everything looked dusty, but it meant that we were breathing in concrete dust all the way through the video."

"THERE WAS A BIT OF ARGY-BARGY BETWEEN US AND BRING ME THE HORIZON"

LOZ TAYLOR

Another shot was inspired by the flickering bulbs in *Stranger Things*.

"We put bulbs everywhere and then we smashed loads of mirrors that are on the floor, and they're twinkling as Tom circles the main set," says Mat.

Released in February 2017 as *You Are We*'s fourth single, *Silence Speaks* caused a furore – two of British metalcore's best bands stepping up together to show off just how brilliant they could be.

"I remember the streams at the time," says Mat. "It hit a million in no time and was just flying. We'd never experienced that pace before."

The song also catapulted While She Sleeps in front of Bring Me The Horizon's significantly larger fanbase.

"People find out about your band, who wouldn't have ever found out about it," adds Loz. "People weren't just listening to Oli's bit. They were like, 'I've found a new band here.'"

It's a platform they have built on ever since. The long road that led the band to a triumphant sold-out gig at London's Alexandra Palace in 2023 most certainly began with *You Are We*, and arguably *Silence Speaks* in particular. It remains their biggest and best-loved song on streaming – a high watermark from an album that managed to break into the UK Top 10 at No.8.

"As much as you're always for the fans, you're always trying to grow your band," says Mat. "*Silence Speaks* is a great example of how we can mesh heavy with a more anthemic sound. We enjoy writing that as well, as much as we do the balls-to-the wall heavy riffs. That song is how we've developed into the band we are now." H

WHILE SHE SLEEPS' NEW ALBUM, *SELF-HELL*, IS OUT NOW VIA SLEEPS BROTHERS. THE BAND PLAY DOWNLOAD FESTIVAL IN JUNE

JAKE OWENS

MONOLITHIC CHILEAN METAL BAND
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PALEDUSK

The genre-mashing metalcore quartet who have caught the ear of Bring Me The Horizon – sax solos and all

WORDS: EMILY SWINGLE

IN A WORLD of grey, Japanese metalcore crew Paledusk exist in a blaze of technicolour. Defiantly resisting the doom-laden social climate, the quartet have dedicated themselves to churning out life-affirming anthems.

"The world can be far too angry – we want to distract people from that," explains vocalist Kaito Nagai.

Formed in 2015 while the members were still in high school, Paledusk stuck to clean-cut metalcore on their early EPs. Then, in 2019, the band released the *Varied* EP, transforming their sound with more emphasis on Bring Me The Horizon-style electronicore elements, the song *Coco* even incorporating raps and twinkling xylophone.

Since then, Paledusk have maintained a consistent presence, releasing another EP in 2020's *Happy Talk*, as well as 10 standalone singles, each fleshing out a unique approach that has made the band rising stars. Weaving together buoyant breakdowns, bruising djent riffs and gritty industrial textures, Paledusk tracks thrive on dynamic twists and unpredictable turns.

New EP *Palehell* is the culmination of their experimental sound. One moment you're drowning in *Super Pale Horse*'s haze of dizzying gacha pop (a term used for the diverse sounds of contemporary Japanese music), before *Rumble* overloads you with blastbeats and sax solos. The daring traversal of genres and instrumentation is all thanks to guitarist and producer Daisuke 'Daidai' Ehara, who joined the band in 2017.

"We always put everything into one track," Daidai explains. "When I'm making songs, I have so many crazy ideas."

Kaito admits he often struggles to "make sense of the craziness" when penning lyrics for a track.

"Daidai's writing is always fucking strange and weird," he laughs. "But then we talk about it, he'll explain his idea. Then it makes a lot more sense."

The group's neon-drenched visuals are just as peculiar as their sound. From Daidai's bleach blond, skunk-striped dye job to their bombastic music videos, Paledusk are outlandishly eccentric. During the music video for recent single *I'm Ready To Die For My Friends*, Kaito performs with gelled-hair devil horns as a horde enact a massive ring a ring o' roses around him. It's delightfully bizarre, and underpins the song's weird bubblegum pop sensibilities.

But Paledusk are aware that their carefree, fun approach can be alienating.

"Sometimes people are… confused," Kaito admits with a grin. "The first time people hear us, we can almost see them thinking 'What the fuck is this?' But people seem to understand it more if they listen back a second time. With an open mind, they realise they actually love it."

Regardless of whether you 'get' Paledusk or not, they're undeniably charming. Live, the gang are powered by pure adrenaline, Kaito grinning throughout and urging the crowds to get involved. You can't help but give in – and, when you do, you're rewarded with a gleeful evening of bouncing along to EDM-infused metalcore bangers. And the band wouldn't have it any other way.

"When people come to our shows, we want to make them feel happy," Kaito says. "We want everyone to leave the show excited to be alive."

Community is an integral ingredient in the Paledusk formula.

"When I started the band I was a high school student who enjoyed making music with my friends… it's the same now," Kaito says. "Working with friends is important for our music."

So far, the band have worked with Japanese talent from across the music spectrum, from rappers including VIGORMAN and Hideyoshi to rockers CVLTE and fellow Japanese metalcore band Crossfaith. Each collaboration is another chance to introduce a new flavour to their sound, but their quirky sonic palette has also garnered attention from some of the highest-profile bands in metalcore. Not only have they toured with the likes of Polaris, The Amity Affliction and While She Sleeps, but they played Bring Me The Horizon's Nex_Fest event in Tokyo last year, and Daidai has lent his writing and production skills to the band for their much-anticipated upcoming record, *Post Human: Nex Gen*. On newest singles *Darkside* and *Kool-Aid*, the Paledusk influence is evident. Daidai hopes his production for bigger artists can serve as a gateway for listeners.

> "WE WANT TO BE THE FIRST LEGENDARY JAPANESE METAL BAND"

"With Paledusk, we're always aiming for a totally new, unique style," he muses. "If I can put some of my style on a bigger band's track, hopefully it will help people understand Paledusk when they listen to it."

Divisive as Paledusk's sound may be, the group have big dreams and, even with a steady stream of singles and EPs, their sights are set on doing something truly special when they finally release a debut full-length album.

"It's been an honour to have been given so many opportunities to see the world, to spread our music," says Kaito. But this is only the beginning."

One of their biggest goals, according to Daidai, is making sure they shine a spotlight on Japanese metal.

"When it comes to metal's history, Japan is often left out," he says – seemingly forgetting about Babymetal. "Japan isn't a huge country when it comes to metal – there's no Slipknot or 'legend' bands. We'd love to be the first legendary Japanese metal band."

Daidai and Kaito look at each other and grin. "It's a really big goal…" adds Kaito, "but we're trying to make history."

***PALEHELL* IS OUT VIA SHARPTONE**

PRESS/YOUSUKE FUJITA

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
Metalcore sprinkled with EDM, soaring on a wave of absolute, unruly optimism

FOR FANS OF:
Bring Me The Horizon, Crossfaith, Electric Callboy

LISTEN TO:
Palehell

Paledusk: set phasers to fun

ALL FOR METAL

Sword and sorcery high fantasy set to rousing power metal

WORDS: WILL MARSHALL • PICTURE: NAT ENEMEDE PHOTOGRAPHY

EMBRACING MANOWAR AND high fantasy, European sextet All For Metal share a love of escapism through otherworldly realms – and they decided the world needed to hear about it through the medium of glorious, (plastic) sword-swinging power metal.

"People are really stressed nowadays. Our music is more about entertaining than the message," explains Antonio Calanna, one of the band's dual vocalists alongside Tim 'Tetzel' Schmidt. "I was always playing with fake swords when I was a kid – now I play this music, wear armour onstage and have a sword in the music videos. It's so fun!"

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE: If Conan the Barbarian made power metal

FOR FANS OF: Manowar, Hammerfall, Battle Beast

LISTEN TO: *All For Metal*

They're well aware of the inherent cheesiness of what they do, and unashamedly lean into it. Onstage, you'll see every member wearing armour and leather like the warriors of old; playing at London's 229, they even bring out backing dancers in similar garb. The overall effect is a heavy metal extravaganza, Tetzel towering over the crowd like a singing barbarian while his comrades in arms supply rousing anthems to get blood and fists pumping.

If there is a message of any kind, it's right there in the name, and self-titled song *All For Metal: 'It's all for metal / And metal for all'* Tetzel and Antonio sing in unison over classic riffs as indebted to Judas Priest as they are Battle Beast. Elsewhere, there's the war-drum stomp of *Goddess Of War* and meadhall singalong *Born In Valhalla*, which pairs charging riffs with dramatic spoken word and over-the-top synth melodies.

It's also clearly written by people who care deeply about what they're doing and have a real love for the subject matter.

"We're serious musicians," Tetzel contends, "and we write catchy music. But we do it to have fun with everything else. Our music isn't silly, but the themes are." MH

***ALL FOR METAL* IS OUT NOW VIA AFM**

Of course All For Metal dress in metal

PRESS/NAT ENEMEDE

End are embracing the chaos

PRESS

END

Will Putney's metalcore mob open the floor for all-star ugliness

WORDS: ALEX DELLER

SOMETIMES YOU GET an itch that just *has* to be scratched. Maybe you want a beer, or a pie, or, in the case of End, to play some heavy-as-fuck metalcore that annihilates everything in its path. That's where guitarist Will Putney found himself back in 2016, and clearly not busy enough slinging riffs with Fit For An Autopsy or engineering other bands' records, he started fielding the idea to pals who've played with the likes of Counterparts, Misery Signals, Shai Hulud and The Acacia Strain.

"There were no plans," says Will. "We thought we'd probably make one record, get it out of our system and then go back to whatever the fuck we normally do."

That, thankfully, wasn't how things panned out; the band are now two LPs, a live album and a scattering of EPs into an increasingly savage career. Their latest record, *The Sin Of Human Frailty*, sees the band expanding on their grinding metalcore, dragging industrial elements into the mix and offering guest spots to members of Heriot, Pig Destroyer and Full Of Hell.

"We've been gravitating towards more extreme places," explains Will. "We've been intentionally doing things that are more broken-sounding and more uncomfortable. The band has been a little more off the rails than we originally thought it would be, and that unpredictability adds to the chaos. We like the music to throw people around, to have them ask, 'What the fuck is happening now?!' That sort of energy makes everything more destructive."

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
Savage, dissonant, grind-influenced metalcore full of unexpected twists

FOR FANS OF:
Will Haven, Vision Of Disorder, Full Of Hell

LISTEN TO:
Thaw

***THE SIN OF HUMAN FRAILTY* IS OUT NOW VIA CLOSED CASKET ACTIVITIES**

Future Static: looking for the light

FUTURE STATIC

The Australians tackling trauma with buoyant metalcore

WORDS: NAOMI SANDERS • PICTURES: ANDREW BASSO

"IN SPAIN, METALHEADS and reggaetoneros [young people involved in the reggaeton culture] hate each other! It's a massive thing," says Future Static vocalist Ami Cook, explaining how the choice to cover 2004 reggaeton hit *Gasolina* helped her reconnect with her past growing up in Barcelona.

Now based in Melbourne, Australia, Ami helped form Future Static in 2021 – and they've since performed around the world. Guitarist Ryan Qualizza explains the *Gasolina* cover came about after a night of listening to 2000s hits after a gig.

"Originally it was a bit of a tongue-in-cheek thing," he admits. "But I had no idea how much it meant to Ami, bringing the two worlds of reggaeton and metal together."

"Rock people in Spain see *Gasolina* as something in poor taste, almost as if we were insulting metal by doing a reggaeton cover, and vice versa." Ami adds. "It's interesting to see the polarity, but I was stoked to blend the two worlds, cause I always loved both."

Future Static's debut album, *Liminality*, was released at the end of 2023, and much of its lyrical content explores Ami's childhood. While *Gasolina* recalls music she enjoyed growing up, songs like *Roach Queen* explore more traumatic experiences.

"I lived in an apartment full of cockroaches," she says, shuddering. "I'd dream that they were going in my mouth every night and then I would wake up and vomit!"

Rather than suffocating in her traumas, Ami uses *Liminality* to grasp for a brighter future.

"The album's vibe is very dark, but there's always a light at the end of the tunnel," she explains. "If someone was in a dark place, our hope is they could listen to it and see that friends can do amazing things together." MH

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
Shockwaves compelling you to mosh, no matter what

FOR FANS OF:
Conquer Divide, Bad Omens, Motionless In White

LISTEN TO:
Roach Queen

***LIMINALITY* IS OUT NOW VIA WILD THING. FUTURE STATIC ARE TOURING THE UK IN MAY AND PLAY RADAR FESTIVAL IN JULY**

PRESS/ANDREW BASSO

Whom Gods Destroy: limits? Pah!

PRESS/GREG VOROBIOV

WHOM GODS DESTROY

Muscular heavy prog from monster musicians

WORDS: PHIL WELLER • PICTURES: GREG VOROBIOV

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE: Dream Theater grinding their teeth on Pantera riffs with epic, bellowed vocals and oodles of acrobatics

FOR FANS OF: Dream Theater, Meshuggah, Whitesnake (on steroids)

LISTEN TO: *Crucifier*

AFTER TWO ALBUMS, Ron 'Bumblefoot' Thal said prog metal supergroup Sons Of Apollo had "split into fragments". Despite that, the former Guns N' Roses guitarist never stopped writing with ex-Dream Theater keyboardist Derek Sherinian and, from those splinters, they forged Whom Gods Destroy.

"We can't deny that we came from Sons Of Apollo, but this band is much heavier and proggier," Bumblefoot explains, praising their songwriting dichotomy. "We've taken the intensity knobs and turned them up; Derek is into vintage stuff, whereas I like to push the envelope, so we give each other shit and find the middle ground."

The band are completed by the rasping, pitched vocals of Dino Jelusick, their "monster of a drummer" Bruno Valverde and Yas Nomura on bass, a talented guitarist who's previously shredded with Steve Vai. They may have supergroup-sized shoes to fill, but that's of no concern to Bumblefoot.

"All that stuff is bullshit," he says. "It's not a popularity contest. The guys aren't household names, but I think they will be – there'll be a generation of people saying 'I grew up listening to those guys.'"

The band's first chapter finds Dino's seismic, aggressive-yet-accessible melodies caught in an angular undercurrent defined by Derek's cinematic soundscapes and Bumblefoot's "evil twin" guitar riffs. However, with the album already written before Bruno and Yas joined, expect the band's sonic personality to evolve into a much hairier beast as they begin work on album two.

"There's nothing these guys can't do," Bumblefoot concludes. "We really have no limits." MH

***INSANIUM* IS OUT NOW VIA INSIDE OUT**

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tinyurl.com/domini-boxset

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RETURN OF THE KING

The new album. The new band. That surprise reunion. How Kerry King made the most anticipated metal album of the year

WORDS: PAUL BRANNIGAN • PICTURES: TRAVIS SHINN

On November 29 and 30, 2019, Slayer brought the curtain down on their 38-year career with the second of two consecutive shows at the 17,500-capacity LA Forum. It was a momentous occasion, but Kerry King, guitarist and co-lyricist since the very beginning of the band, shed no tears before, during or after the show.

"I don't think I had time," he says today, casting his mind back. "I was busy. Was it overwhelming? Yeah, probably. But tears? No, I don't think one came out."

The managers of the Forum had extended the curfew until 3am to facilitate a fabulously messy after-party, but even as family members, friends and VIP guests including Kirk Hammett, Scott Ian, King Diamond, rapper Post Malone and actor Jason Momoa offered their congratulations and best wishes on the night, Kerry had already mentally clocked off, eager to make his next move.

Not only had he already discreetly assembled a new band, and earmarked which unreleased songs from sessions for Slayer's 2015 *Repentless* album this as-yet-unnamed group would re-record for his debut solo album, he had even thrown out a handful of bespoke plectrums at the end of each gig on Slayer's 19-date Final Campaign victory lap. These picks, collectors' items today, displayed a silhouette of King playing guitar in front of a wall of flames on one side and the words 'Reborn 2020' on the other. With this simple declaration of independence, Kerry King made it clear that, post-Slayer, he would still be taking care of business on his own terms.

"I knew what my future was, and I knew what that future would sound like," he says now. "I just hadn't envisaged a pandemic putting the future on hold for so long."

The global shutdown did at least afford Kerry additional space in which to perfect his plans. He was rarely idle. In fact, the lyrics for two songs on his album were completed during one 36-hour quarantine period spent in a hotel room after testing positive for Covid-19. All the while, he kept details of his new project locked down.

"I'm dragging my feet on letting the world know what I'm doing because there's no rush," he told *Hammer* back in October 2021. "But you will see me in the future. It will be fucking good."

On May 17, you will be able to decide for yourself whether his debut solo album, *From Hell I Rise*, lives up to that promise. But trust us, if you're a Slayer fan, you will not be disappointed. Having previously described it as "an extension of Slayer", the guitarist is fully aware that *From Hell I Rise* will be judged against one of the most formidable catalogues in the history of metal.

"I feel this record is some of the best stuff I've ever done," he says with the quiet confidence of a man who knows that the work needs no hype.

Elevated by career-best performances from his new all-star band - Death Angel vocalist Mark Osegueda, former Vio-lence/Machine Head guitarist Phil Demmel,

He's baaaaaack!

"THE SLAYER REUNION IS NOT GOING TO TRANSLATE INTO RECORDING"

Same old Kerry. Thank fuck

ex-Hellyeah bassist Kyle Sanders and long-time Slayer drummer Paul Bostaph – the album's 13 songs are all thrillingly intense, unrelentingly aggressive and fearlessly uncompromising.

That ferocity is enhanced by scathing lyrics that rage against intolerance, bigotry, hypocrisy, corruption, feckless politicians, brutish warmongers, the church and the state. Two songs – the title track and apoplectic state-of-the-nation address *Rage* – are holdovers from the *Repentless* sessions. Everything else sounds like it could be, albeit with Phil Demmel's classic metal melodicism and Mark Osegueda's expansive range adding texture and dynamics.

Is it *Reign In Blood* good? Don't be ridiculous, no metal album will ever be *Reign In Blood* good again. But, song-for-song, *From Hell I Rise* effortlessly crushes almost everything Slayer have released since *Seasons In The Abyss* in 1990.

"Did I feel like I had something to prove?" Kerry considers. "I think I felt that more on the last Slayer album, because it was the first album without Jeff [Hanneman, King's fellow guitarist and songwriter in Slayer, who passed away in 2013, aged 49]. I think I had a chip on my shoulder because I knew people were saying, 'Ah, Hanneman isn't there, it's not going to be that good.' But then *Repentless* came out and they were like, 'Huh, King can do it on his own.'

"I THOUGHT MAYBE MERCYFUL FATE MIGHT COME KNOCKING, BUT NO"

"This is completely on me, so I knew that I had to come up with some great stuff. I think of myself as a fan first, so if I'm into it and I think it's something really special, I think my fans are going to think it's awesome."

The guitarist's beautiful Manhattan home, located in the hip, upscale Tribeca neighbourhood, is the type of apartment for which the expression 'property porn' could have been coined. Purchased in 2022 by Kerry and his wife Ayesha for a reported $3.65 million, its minimalist decor – all white walls and gleaming surfaces – is a world removed from the chaotic, blood-soaked hellscapes his music evokes.

"The white walls mean you can put out any kind of painting or sculpture," he explains politely when this contrast is mentioned. "And while we're certainly not fine art collectors, it's nice to be able to create your own vibe."

While the Los Angeles-born Kerry never expected to end up living on the East Coast, he concedes that New York has "a different but super-cool vibe". He credits Anthrax bassist Frank Bello and Skid Row guitarist Dave 'Snake' Sabo as easing his relocation to the Big Apple, and talks up the area's restaurants.

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Metal Blade

"My main worry here is knowing what to eat without sitting around and getting fat, because I gotta get back to work soon," he says, referring to his debut solo shows later this year.

In conversation, the 59-year-old is relaxed and good-humoured, much less brusque than he sometimes comes across as. But you won't get that impression from reading his furious lyrics throughout *From Hell I Rise*. He singles out a line from the song *Toxic* – *'Too many people spend too much time forcing their opinion on other people's lives'* – as pivotal, admitting that much of his disgust throughout the album comes from his anger at seeing how America has become more polarised in the wake of Donald Trump's rise to power midway through the last decade.

"Of course there are places in the world that are far worse off than America," he says, "but since 2016 it's gone bad here, it's been… [long pause] a nutty ride, how's that?"

Before Slayer split, Kerry made no secret of his opposition to Tom Araya's vocal support of Trump, and while it wasn't the pair's divergent political views that led the band to break up, he acknowledges that the opportunity to call out shit exactly as he sees it in his lyrics now is liberating.

"I knew that I wasn't going to get any backlash saying what I felt," he says.

"THE TIMING OF THE SLAYER ANNOUNCEMENT WAS OUT OF MY HANDS"

By his own admission, he was totally blindsided, and not a little irritated, by Tom's decision to call time on Slayer.

"We quit too early," he stated bluntly in 2021. "Fuck us."

In an interview with *Rolling Stone* on February 5 this year, the same day as the album's first single, *Idle Hands*, was released, Kerry admitted that he hadn't spoken to his ex-bandmate since the post-gig party at the Forum.

"Not even a text. Not even an email," he said, then casually added: "But I don't wish him dead at this moment"

Which made what happened next even more surprising. Just over two weeks later, it was announced that Slayer would be reforming to play a headline show at the Louder Than Life festival in Louisville, Kentucky on September 27 (more festival date announcements followed).

It's difficult not to view the timing of the Slayer reunion announcement as weird at best and damaging at worst. Media attention switched in an instant from one of 2024's most eagerly anticipated metal albums to the most unexpected reformation of the year. Days before our scheduled interview with the guitarist took place, an instruction was received from the guitarist's camp that the subject of Slayer's return would be off-limits in this

Kerry hates all kinds of people… and lets rip about them on his new songs

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conversation, with his UK publicist monitoring the interview to ensure this directive is followed.

It's odd, given the guitarist has never been one to duck a difficult question. He cheerfully admits today to being "a little bit surprised" that he didn't receive a single approach to join another band after rumours of Slayer's planned retirement were confirmed, expressing mock indignation at this industry-wide snub.

"I got a reputation! I don't suck!" he protests. "I thought maybe Mercyful Fate might come knocking, but no. I was like, 'What the hell is going on here?'"

More seriously, he confirms the rumours that he entertained the possibility of collaborating with Pantera frontman Phil Anselmo.

"He heard some material, but honestly that was about it. We talked, emailed, texted, off and on, he's a hard guy to get on the phone, a hard guy to get responses from," he says, insisting that he harboured no regrets when those discussions petered out. Read between the lines here, and there's a distinct sense that while an alliance with Anselmo would have delighted some industry big-hitters, Mark Osegueda was always the man Kerry wanted fronting his band.

"I knew, at the end of the day, what the right decision was," he says tactfully of his final choice of singer. "I was just waiting for it to fall into my lap."

"TO BE ABLE TO TALK TO TONY IOMMI LIKE A NORMAL PERSON BLOWS MY MIND"

The first person Kerry played his new album to was Brian Slagel, the founder and CEO of Metal Blade Records, a neat full circle moment ahead of his second act. It was Brian who introduced Slayer to the world in 1983 when he included their song *Aggressive Perfector* on his label's *Metal Massacre III* compilation, and Metal Blade released the band's first two albums, *Show No Mercy* and *Hell Awaits*, as well as the *Haunting The Chapel* and *Live Undead* EPs. He remains one of only a handful of people whose opinions Kerry values, and the guitarist makes no effort to temper his delight with the feedback Brian offered when he heard an early playback of *From Hell I Rise*.

"I don't even think we got past the third song before he told me that the hair was standing up on his arms," says Kerry with a chuckle. "I said, 'Well, I guess it's a hit!'"

The prospect of being involved with hit records was far from either man's thoughts when Brian offered Slayer that slot on the *Metal Massacre III* album after watching them opening for the Metal Blade band Bitch in Anaheim, California. Which is not to say that the teenage Kerry King or his bandmates lacked ambition, focus or drive. After the guitarist purchased the first *Metal Massacre* compilation, which featured *Hit The Lights* by 'Mettallica' [sic] as the closing track on side two, his own band's collective opinion was, "We can come up with something better than this shit."

Today, he recalls that even when they were filling out their setlist with Iron Maiden and Judas Priest covers, Slayer never doubted their own potential.

"We're talking about teenagers," he says, "and teenagers think they can do anything. We knew we had something good. We hoped and believed that the world would come around to heavier music, and so it proved."

Such was Kerry's commitment to the cause that when his father, employed as an aircraft parts inspector, offered to find his musician son a position at the same company, the proposition was met with the enquiry: "Will I be able to go on tour?" Told "Probably not", the guitarist responded: "Then thanks, but no thanks."

"Back then I never had a job that I'd have been upset to lose," he recalls. "I worked at a jewellery store, and a mini-golf place, and a pet store, but I always said that if a gig came up, and I couldn't get the time off, then it was, 'See ya!'"

To their credit, Kerry's parents remained supportive of their youngest child's ambitions. After Brian Slagel informed Slayer that he didn't have the money to release a full-length album on Metal Blade, it was Mr and Mrs King who, along with Tom Araya, chipped in to finance the recording, pressing and releasing of *Show No Mercy*. Today, Kerry admits that it wasn't until the release of *Reign In Blood*, at which point Slayer got to tour in a bus, that he felt the band's future was secure.

"I'm pretty sure I didn't consider us rock stars," he says, "but if I look back, I think I probably thought, 'Well, at least we're in the brotherhood now.'"

He singles out Slayer's first appearance at the Monsters Of Rock festival at Donington Park in 1992 as highlight of the band's storied career.

"That was really big for me, a dream come true, because we'd always read about these incredible bills featuring incredible bands, and it took us a long time to get there. Plus I got to meet Venom that day!"

Despite the bullish persona, he says it took him far longer than it should have to be able to talk to his heavy metal heroes without feeling like a total fanboy.

"Tony Iommi is a total idol to me, so to be able to talk with him like a normal person would blow my mind," he says.

It's here that you get a glimpse of the sweet, polite and rather nerdy Kerry King that existed before the discovery of a) Van Halen and b) girls derailed his studies, and before an obsessive love affair with heavy metal led to the formation of Slayer and the 38-year journey that brought him to this point. It seems like an opportune moment to address the elephant in the room.

When the realisation hit that Slayer would not last forever, what was his first thought?

"That I wasn't done."

Timing-wise, is it not odd now to be doing promo for your record, when literally weeks ago it was announced that Slayer are coming back to do these shows? There is the briefest of pauses before he answers.

"Yes, it was not my favourite timing. In Kerry King world, would I have wished that that announcement had taken place a few months later? Absolutely. But that was out of my hands. The announcement came, and people got all excited or all pained about it, but hopefully when I release another song, the attention will switch back to my record."

So are you looking at these shows as basically a good promo opportunity for your record?

"I think that's my manager's idea, and my promoter's idea, that's how they look at it," he says. "[The Slayer reunion] is not going to translate into recording and it's not going to

Kerry King: surprisingly not trying out some "sensitive singer/songwriter shit"

Kerry is rightly super-proud of his new stuff. It'll melt your face off!

translate into touring. For me, it's three shows marking five years since our final shows, a fun, 'Hey, remember us from before the pandemic?' celebration."

Have you spoken to Tom since the news broke?

"No."

Is that not a bit unusual?

"What's usual? There's no textbook for this stuff. It's not like I'm angry with him or anything, we're very different people, and we evolved into business partners at the end of the day. He has very different interests from me, and very different outlooks. Does that make me hate him? No. But I don't need to talk to him every day."

We're not trying to stir up shit here…

"Oh, I know."

…but how is this going to work, practically? Will you wait for management to force you into a room together to rehearse?

"It's not weird. We just don't have much in common. When it comes time to rehearse, I'll have no problem showing up. We're professionals, and that's what we do."

At this point, a muffled interjection from another voice on the call indicates discussion of this particular topic is now closed.

"I STILL WRITE RIFFS THAT MAKE ME LIFT MY GUITAR OVER MY HEAD"

Before our conversation closes, Kerry mentions that today he's dressed "in camo, my zip-up boots, and a band t-shirt", same as ever. It's a neat visual reminder of just how little he has changed after four decades, even if the world around him is almost unrecognisable from the one in which he and his teenage buddies set out to form the darkest, fastest, heaviest and nastiest metal band the world had ever seen.

"There is no Kerry King 'character'," he says at one point. "What you see is what you get. You all know me. I have no reason to lie."

From Hell I Rise was never intended to change that. Whatever *'So begins my revolution'*, the teasing opening lyric of *Idle Hands*, may imply, Kerry King isn't seeking to break free from his own history.

"If I had any craving to deviate from the path – trying out some sensitive singer/songwriter shit or showing off a new-found interest in jazz – this would be the time to do it, right?" he says, chuckling once more. "But that's not who I am. I've been playing the kind of music I love for most of my life, and while I think what I've done on this record has a mildly different spin on it, there's no question when you turn it on who you're listening to.

"Is that enough for everyone? It's enough for me. I still write riffs that make me lift my guitar over my head and do a little victory dance because I'm so stoked with how they sound. There's a whole new energy to this record, and a whole new excitement, but it's not a whole new me, because I'm not finished being me. And if you like what Kerry King does as much as I like what Kerry King does, you won't be disappointed." H

***FROM HELL I RISE* IS RELEASED ON MAY 17 VIA REIGNING PHOENIX MUSIC. KERRY KING WILL PLAY DOWNLOAD FESTIVAL ON SUNDAY JUNE 16**

"I'M CLIMBING OUT OF THE ASHES OF SLAYER"

Kerry King's guide to every song on *From Hell I Rise*

DIABLO
"Having walked out onstage for 30-40 years to an intro, I knew this record needed a fucking intro, and this is it. It starts out with a heavy, heavy, heavy riff, super-powerful, and to me it sounds like somebody badass is coming to the stage."

WHERE I REIGN
"This gives me goosebumps every time I hear it. The title definitely references my history, which is a cool continuity link from Slayer to Kerry King. The key lyric here is *'From Hell I will rise'*, which obviously ties in with the title track closing the album."

RESIDUE
"*Residue* is about a shady politician. There's some super-haunting octave guitar in here, which keeps recurring, and every time I hear it, I'm like, 'I'm so glad I made that up!'"

IDLE HANDS
"*Idle Hands is* a good representative of what the album is. From fans to friends to musician peers, everyone has been super-excited about it, and I've had so many people sending congratulations my way after hearing it."

TROPHIES OF THE TYRANT
"After this title flew out of my mouth, I knew what it would be written about: war, specifically the war in Ukraine. Lyrics like *'The dead impaled and crucified'* are my attempt to evoke war-time brutalities."

CRUCIFIXATION
"I thought I was a genius for making that title up… and then discovered that about eight fucking bands had used that word before me! I call this the money shot, because it's pure 80s thrash from top to bottom and people are going to love it."

TENSION
"I had the title for *Tension* in my head for the longest time, and it fits here because the music sounds tense to me. Every verse is its own little story with the final line saying things like *'Violence is everything.'*"

EVERYTHING I HATE ABOUT YOU
"Is this targeted at any one individual in particular? No, I hate all kinds of people, and it's very easy for me to get angry about things! It has a fast, punky vibe."

TOXIC
"This was written while I was stuck in a hotel room after getting Covid, after [reproductive rights law] Roe vs. Wade in America got overturned. Every Supreme Court Justice that got put into office during the Trump administration lied to get their job, and I'm not OK with that."

TWO FISTS
"I intentionally wrote this to be like a 1980s punk song. Lines like, *'This fuckin' ship's about to sink / I think I need another drink'* were fun to write."

RAGE
"This is one of the two songs that were left over from *Repentless*, and it's another political one. I finished it during the pandemic, when there was a lot of rioting going on in America, and it has that sense of anger."

SHRAPNEL
"Here I wanted to take a riff similar to [Scorpions'] *Animal Magnetism* and mix it with a riff like *Hell Awaits*. It's my interpretation of what it would be like being on patrol in times of war."

FROM HELL I RISE
"This is the other song that was left over from *Repentless*, and it's a 'I'm Kerry King, I don't care about religion' song. It's the sound of me climbing out of the ashes of Slayer, preparing to kick ass once more."

“We never thought we would see this”

Not only have Within Temptation released a new single decrying the Ukraine war, singer Sharon den Adel flew to Kyiv to film the video. This is her firsthand account of visiting a warzone

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS • PICTURES: KIRAI GIGS

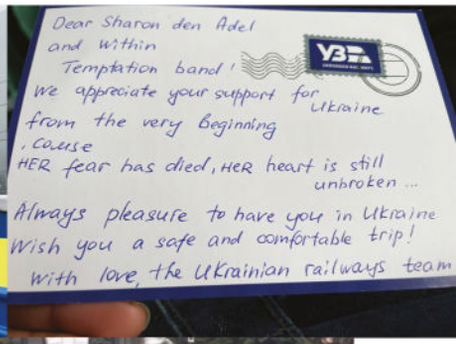
When Russian president Vladimir Putin launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, it shocked the world. In the months since, Within Temptation have become one of the fiercest anti-war voices in music. As well as speaking out and waving the Ukrainian flag at their live shows, several tracks on last year's *Bleed Out* album voiced their fear and anger over the ongoing conflict.

Now the Dutch metallers have gone a step further, with new standalone single *A Fool's Parade*. A track that had been left on the cutting room floor during the sessions for their powerhouse 2019 album *Resist*, the band dusted it off and rewrote the lyrics, while an incendiary guest turn in the song's blistering middle eight comes courtesy of Ukrainian rock artist, Alex Yarmak.

"It refers to the fact that Russia tries to blind a lot of people," explains singer Sharon den Adel of the songtitle and meaning. "There's a lot of propaganda, changing their story constantly about what history is or what history was, and telling people that Ukraine are fascists, twisting history. That is what they do. They divide and conquer constantly. We're living in the West. We have a free press. We have so many possibilities to see what the real story is. It's such a clear war. Who is the invader and who is trying to protect their country? That there's even discussion is unbelievable."

While most people wouldn't dream of travelling to an active warzone, Sharon spent a weekend in the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, where she recorded the video for the single, working alongside Ukrainian director, Indy Hait. It was a trip made possible by Music Saves UA, a non-profit organisation working to raise awareness, funds and provide humanitarian aid to those affected by the conflict.

"When you go, it's at your own risk. You're not insured," says Sharon. "I want to keep the attention on Ukraine, and to keep people thinking about it, because news just fades away very quickly. News today is old news tomorrow. It's the same with the war. The war doesn't stop. I know a lot of people are tired of it, but Ukraine doesn't have that luxury to be tired of the war because then they'll lose."



Sharon caught the night train from Chełm, Poland to Kyiv. The Ukrainian Railways team were clearly delighted to have her on the trip

Kyiv's Maidan Nezalezhnosti –Independence Square. Every flag represents a lost loved one

SHARON'S DIARY

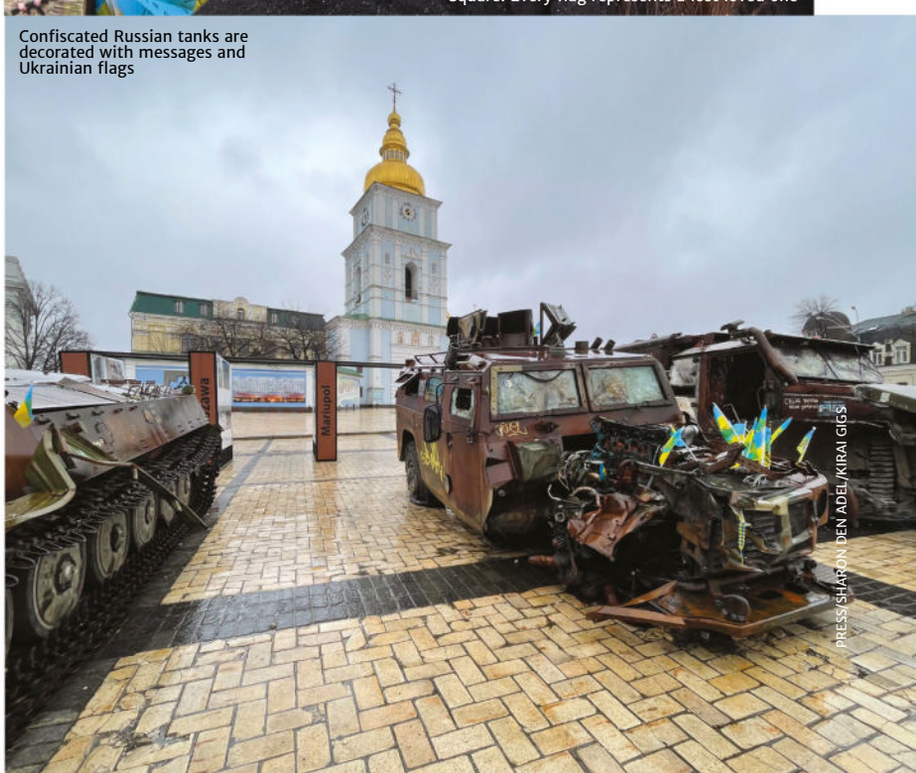
DAY 1/ SATURDAY

"We arrived in Kyiv early in the morning, and Alex Yarmak and the Music Saves UA crew were waiting for us at the railway station. It was a real warm welcome. We didn't have a security detail. I just had our monitor guy, and he was actually the only one who was willing to come. I didn't take the band with me because we had to arrange things so quickly. This was a preparation day for the video shoot, to do make-up and clothes. Everybody in the crew was Ukrainian. We could have done the video in the Netherlands, but because the song is about the whole situation between Ukraine and Russia, it made more sense for us to go there and shoot key places. You can't feel that emotion when you're not there.

"In the evening we went for dinner, and had a lot of long talks with people. The charity took us to this restaurant where everything is traditionally Ukrainian. The potatoes are from the soil of Ukraine. The fish comes out of their rivers. And we ate borscht, which is a soup with beetroot made traditionally with meat. And we had special bread with cinnamon and herb oil. It was delicious.

"There was not one person who didn't have a personal story. One of the girls that was working with us, her brother of 37 years old died at the front, and he left a small child and

Confiscated Russian tanks are decorated with messages and Ukrainian flags



PRESS/SHARON DEN ADEL/KIRAI GIGS

Sharon at the huge Motherland statue

"MARK HAMILL'S VOICE SAYS, 'MAY THE FORCE BE WITH YOU'"

his wife behind. It was those things that immediately gave me goosebumps, the real tragedy of this war."

DAY 2/ SUNDAY

"We started shooting the music video at 6am. First, we went to a field near Makariv town on the outskirts of Kyiv, where there was a lot of bombing at the start of the war. The idea was that, in the video, Alex would show me the story of the Ukraine war. I'm just standing there, and all of a sudden we see birds coming out of the sky, and they attack like drones.

"The second location was at a medical supplies warehouse in Kalynivka village that got bombed. There was still a lot of medical equipment and medicines on the floor. You could smell medicine in the air. We filmed in the centre of that place. You can see the devastation, what a bombing does to a building. We wanted to show that they intentionally bombed a medical supply warehouse, because they knew, of course.

"Then we went to the Knowledge Square, near the Kyiv Polytechnic Institute, a huge building where they had beautiful murals of people running towards each other. It has a certain movement and it's really beautiful. We were standing in the middle with a camera circling around us.

"We had a scene at a huge statue called The Motherland. It's from 1981, at the time the Soviets were still were running everything. It's a sculpture of a woman holding a sword in one hand and a shield in the other, and recently they put the Ukraine coat of arms on it and took away the Russian elements of a hammer and sickle. They have some

PRESS/SHARON DEN ADEL/KIRAI GIGS

"Music is the ultimate relief"

Ukrainian guest vocalist Alex Yarmak explains how he collaborated with Within Temptation, and what it's like being an artist in Kyiv

WHAT WAS YOUR ROLE ON *A FOOL'S PARADE*?
"The band emailed me the song and I created a part for myself and put some vocals on other parts. We edited the whole song, but the main concept stayed the same."

WHAT ARE YOUR LYRICS ABOUT? AT ONE POINT YOU SCREAM *'YOU WILL NOT MAKE ME DOUBT MYSELF!'*
"The lyrics were inspired by a book called *The Art Of War* [by Chinese military general, Sun Tzu] He said that when you don't know yourself, you don't know the enemy either."

WHAT DID SHARON'S VISIT TO UKRAINE MEAN TO YOU?
"I think it's really brave of her to come here. Almost no one has done things like that. In particular, no one has shot a music video here."

HOW HAS YOUR LIFE CHANGED SINCE THE WAR?
"The thing that has changed drastically is my understanding of what life is and how precious it is. My message here will be that we all need to cherish the day a bit more. Simple things. Because there's a huge probability that you won't have them tomorrow. I think you can hear the expression of those emotions in the song."

WHAT KEEPS YOU GOING?
"Your body adjusts to everything that is going on. Your mind adjusts, your body adjusts. It doesn't matter how hard it is. You need to find something inside you that keeps you moving forward. There's one front line where our men, our courageous men, are defending our freedom, and I really appreciate that."

HAS MUSIC HELPED YOU SINCE THE WAR BEGAN?
"Immensely. Music is the ultimate relief. We have a lot of patriotic music that helps people to keep their spirits up. We make jokes about it because it's sometimes cringey, but I think it was needed when the invasion started. I suggest you research new, fresh Ukrainian music that is emerging right now, because that's the representation of how we feel and how we express ourselves. It's honest. It's genuine – hatespeech and Blind8 are my favourite Ukrainian metal bands."

WHAT DO YOU HOPE *A FOOL'S PARADE* CAN ACHIEVE?
"I hope this song will be seen and heard. It has a powerful message, and it's our duty to make people talk, to do everything that will benefit Ukraine. I think the most important thing for all Ukrainians right now, and all the people who share our values, is to not stop talking about Ukraine. And I hope this song will be a call to action."

confiscated tanks from the Russians there as well, and people have been writing messages on them in blue and yellow paint. Messages of hope, but also of pain.

"We asked fans to come to the video shoot at the Patriot Studio, in the Obolon area of Kyiv, to participate. I told Indy, the director, that what inspires me so much about Ukraine is the resilience of the people. They're so committed to winning this war. Their fighting spirit reminds me of the phoenix rising from the flames. There was a pool of mud we made, and he said, 'Well, maybe we can do something with that, and make people rise from the mud and stand up and fight. They will fight on, they will dance on, they will go on with life, and they will never give up living, and they will never give up fighting for each other.'

"Then the Air Alert went off. I said, 'OK, what are we going to do?' And the people from the charity said, 'The room we are now in, it's closed with only walls. There are no windows, so we're safe.' There needs to be at least one wall between you and a drone, so it can't hurt you.

"Everybody in Ukraine has an Air Alert app. Everybody is actually informed in time, because they have time to get a coffee and go to a shelter. I never had any fear for my own safety at all. As long as you're not running out of battery, which you shouldn't, then you're fine. There was a shelter underneath the ground in every hotel, actually. That's the reason why there's not that many casualties, I guess. Of course, close towards where it's really happening on the East side, where there's constantly bombing and people and cities attacked, there are way more casualties than in Kyiv.

"What makes it a bit lighter is every time the alert goes off, when you get a notification that the danger is over, it says, 'May the force be with you', and the voice who says that is Mark Hamill. He's part of a special ambassador group that [Ukrainian President, Volodymyr] Zelenskyy was involved in putting together."

DAY 3/ MONDAY

"On Monday, we had a lot of promotion for radio and newspapers. We went to the biggest rock radio station in Kyiv, called Radio ROKS. There was an interviewer there, Sonya Sotnyk, and her husband was on the front, fighting. She was also doing humanitarian work, in addition to her job at the station. She went to the Netherlands and got as many SUVs as she could, and took them back to Kyiv so the army could use those to move from one place to another. Everybody has a double day job, almost. Daily life goes on for 90% of people in Kyiv, until there's an attack or the alarm goes off.

"We also went to a place called Maidan Nezalezhnosti [Independence Square] where they had little flags. Every flag stands for a person that's died. When people lose someone, they can buy a small flag and put it in the soil. It just goes on endlessly. That was really breaking me up. You can keep it at a distance when you hear it on the news. But when you're there, you see the flags and you see the personal photos of people that have died – young men and some even still boys.

"Since World War II, we thought we were smarter. Seeing that, it was really a realisation that we'll never learn. We never thought we'd see this close up. It just takes one crazy guy. I really hope that people start realising what a danger Russia is. They're not just fighting for their own freedom, but for everyone's freedom if Putin doesn't stop at Ukraine.

"It started raining more heavily, so we went to the subway under the square, where there was also a mall. All of a sudden, the Air Alert went off. Apparently, a MiG was on the way. It's a special aircraft that can carry a bomb that can wipe out a whole area. Everyone was saying, 'Oh, God, another alarm.' But a lot of people were like, 'Oh, another day…' The alarm was quite quickly turned off again. It's like, 'OK, alarm's over. May the force be with you', and everybody went outside again.

Ukrainian director Indy Hait is behind the excellent *A Fool's Parade* video

Sharon hugs Radio ROKS anchor Sonya Sotnyk. Sonya does humanitarian work while her husband is fighting on the front

Drone-branded tea bags. The war really is omnipresent

Sharon with Radio ROKS anchor Illya Yarema. Illya is a soldier serving in a special unit but is allowed to be on air for a few hours each week. The wall behind them is decorated with patches from soldiers on the front lines

PRESS/SHARON DEN ADEL/KIRAI GIGS

Filming at a field near Makariv town on the outskirts of Kyiv. The area was subjected to a lot of bombing at the beginning of the war

Within Temptation fans gather together in Kyiv

Muddy fans in a scene from the *A Fool's Parade* video

These colours most certainly don't run

"ALL OF A SUDDEN, THE AIR ALERT WENT OFF"

"We didn't just go to places that were heavy and intense. Of course, we wanted to see that, because we wanted to see up close the reality of what people are going through. But we also went to Peizazhna Alley, where we had a beautiful view of the city, and we were looking over the old town. It was really amazing. Although people have intense stories about family members who have died, still they're very positive. They try to contribute and fight on in their own way. And they get courage out of that.

"I'm really happy to have had this experience. I think there's a lot of people that feel powerless and don't know what to do. I'm glad that we could do something with music. We met a lot of new, beautiful people again that we're still in touch with. It was a lifetime experience."

WITHIN TEMPTATION WILL DONATE ALL ROYALTIES OF *A FOOL'S PARADE* TO MUSIC SAVES UA FOR THE DURATION OF THE WAR. SEE WITHIN-TEMPTATION.COM

What is Music Saves UA?

Inside the nonprofit organisation that made Sharon's trip to Ukraine possible

The dream team (left to right): PR manager Anna Dolynska, project manager Nataliia Marmaliuk, producer and vocalist Alex Yarmak, sound engineer and tour manager Bennie Veenstra, Sharon den Adel, charity boss Mariana Mokrynska

To make Sharon's trip to Kyiv a reality, Within Temptation partnered with Music Saves UA, a non-profit fundraising organisation with roots in the Ukrainian music industry, which aims to help civilians. Shortly after Sharon's trip, her husband/Within Temptation recording guitarist Robert Westerholt visited Ukraine as part of Music Save UA's Music Ambassadors Tour, where they invited 12 people from 11 European countries to Kyiv and the Chernihiv region.

"We were under airstrikes all the time, like two times a day," says PR manager Anna Dolynska. "That's how we make a difference – you read this on the news, but when you come here and see it with your own eyes, it feels different."

SEE MORE AT MUSICSAVESUA.COM

PRESS/SHARON DEN ADEL/KIRAI GIGS

"WE WANT TO BE THE BIGGEST HEAVY BAND IN THE WORLD!"

Armed with viral mosh calls and approved by the likes of Billie Eilish and Demi Lovato, Knocked Loose are fast becoming hardcore's breakout success story

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL • PICTURES: JAKE OWENS

All it takes is one word. Just one word, comprising three letters and one syllable, repeated twice.

Bryan Garris, frontman of hardcore superstars Knocked Loose, looks out at the sprawling mass of bodies in front of him at London's Kentish Town Forum, puts his mic to his lips, and detonates the bomb.

"Arf! Arf!" he barks.

The rest is chaos.

Two and a half thousand people, from the floor to the balcony, are screaming and throwing their legs and fists around with abandon, slamming into each other as if it's the last thing they'll ever do.

It might be mayhem, but it's calculated mayhem, as Bryan explained earlier in the band's dressing room.

"I feel like every decision that we make when it comes to writing is based off the live show," he said. "We have a setlist that is completely built around crowd participation, and where in our songs we can create moments in a live setting."

It's an approach that's working for them. That "Arf! Arf!" mosh call comes from the song *Counting Worms*, from Knocked Loose's debut album, *Laugh Tracks*. Upon release in 2016, it went viral. Neither an Architects-style bleh, nor a Machine Head-style roar, it was a full-on, never-heard-before dog bark. Not only did it inspire a slew of YouTube reaction videos and memes, it currently has more than 31 million plays on Spotify.

Last June, the Oldham County, Kentucky quintet surprise-released two songs with similarly massive mosh calls – *Everything Is Quiet Now*, featuring the title belted aloud, and *Deep In The Willow*, with its declaration of *'Knocked Loose, motherfucker!'*

That summer, Billie Eilish was caught on video banging her head side stage as Knocked Loose won over the notoriously snobby Coachella festival, while US pop royalty Demi Lovato gushed about wanting to collaborate with them. But Knocked Loose are a hardcore band – and a monumentally brutal hardcore band at that. How the hell did this happen?

To find out, we have travelled to London on a rainy Sunday afternoon to witness Knocked Loose's biggest-ever headline show. The first person we bump into is their perma-smiling drummer, Kevin 'Pacsun' Kaine, who has just been handed a sushi meal deal by an Uber Eats delivery man at the stage door. He leads us up the stairs to the band's dressing room.

"We love the UK," he grins. "But man, this weather sucks."

No shit, but there's still a hardy handful of fans waiting outside the venue a full three hours before doors – something that Pacsun is having trouble coming to terms with.

"It's crazy," he shrugs. "This whole run's been just insane."

Nicko seems to have Pacsun well trained!

Backstage is pretty damn debauched, huh?

We enter Knocked Loose's dressing room, and Pacsun introduces his bandmates: bassist Kevin Otten, guitarist Nicko Calderon, and frontman Bryan Garris, who is pacing around waiting for his lunch, and seems to have one eye on a crew member's Greggs sausage roll. The only member missing is lead guitarist Isaac Hale, who is feeling unwell, probably due to the British weather.

Are you familiar with Greggs, Bryan?

"Dude, if I could have that stuff imported to the States, there's no amount of money I wouldn't pay," he replies, his eyes bulging.

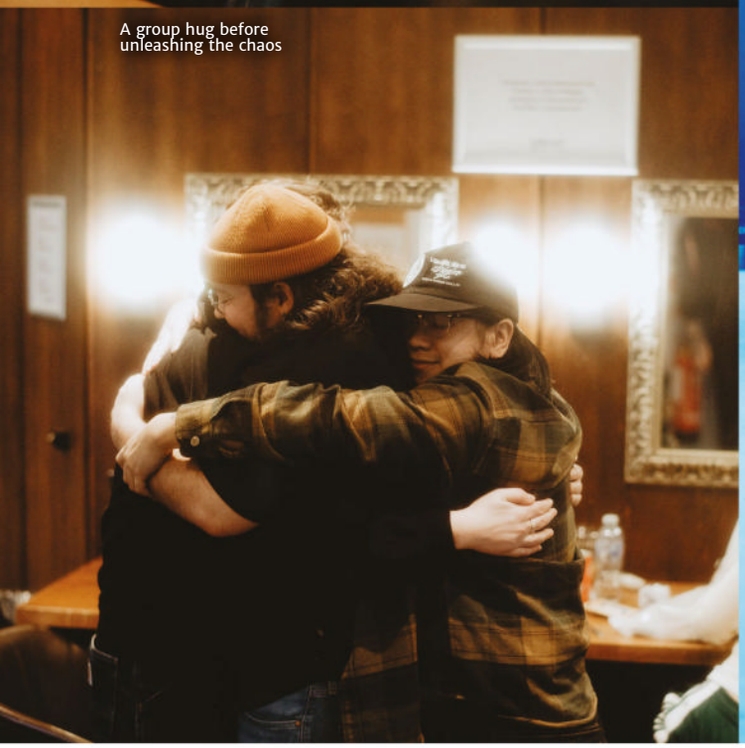
For someone who's the mouthpiece of Knocked Loose, and who screams with such intensity for a living, Bryan is a softly spoken man with a quiet confidence. Having bonded over a shared love of steak bakes, we ask whether crossover success was ever on his mind. The band might have released *Laugh Tracks* in 2016 and follow-up album *A Different Shade Of Blue* in 2019, and toured with heavyweights including Parkway Drive, Beartooth and Gojira, but it's *now* that they seem to be breaking into the wider cultural consciousness.

"We've always tried to blur what we are, you know?" he replies. "Even back when we were touring at a DIY level, we would do metal tours and hardcore tours, and play with pop punk bands and play with rappers. We just wanted to play as much as we could."

But the things you've done are on a scale that's usually unheard of for a band in your genre…

"Yeah, that success has definitely allowed us to do things that we never expected or sought out to do when we started this band," he continues. "In 2022, we did a tour opening for [NOLA hip hop duo] $uicide Boy$, which is weird enough,

If the band thing doesn't work out, expect Bryan to open a Greggs Stateside



A group hug before unleashing the chaos

Nicko: more hardcore than you'll ever be

Isaac Hale: under the weather but still raging

"A WIN FOR US IS A WIN FOR EVERYBODY, AND VICE VERSA"

BRYAN GARRIS

but then we get there and they're doing 20,000 tickets in New Mexico. It was an amazing experience, them allowing us to play in front of that many people every single night. When we started this band, we never thought we'd see a thousand people, let alone 20."

It helps that hardcore is having a moment. In the early 2000s, bands with hardcore influences, such as Hatebreed and Refused, shook up heavy music but didn't infiltrate the mainstream. During the last few years, Code Orange have played WWE pay-per-views, while Turnstile have been nominated for four Grammys, appeared on three major US talk shows (*Late Night With Seth Meyers*, *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* and *The Tonight Show With Jimmy Fallon*), and have done Glastonbury.

"I think there's a lot of really cool bands," says Bryan. "I feel like every year you get to witness a band open new doors for the genre. We're fans of it first, so we like to support, and we like to see people win. We think that a win for us is a win for everybody, and vice versa."

But while Code Orange have alt rock and electronic leanings, and Turnstile offer boyband good looks and sun-kissed, good-time 80s vibes, Knocked Loose bring crushing beatdowns, death metal tendencies and naked aggression, underpinned by Bryan's unique – some would say unusual – screeching. In a genre that still hasn't had a genuine mainstream breakthrough band, they might be about to succeed.

Do you ever consider that in 20 years' time, when people talk about hardcore, they'll mention your band in the same way as Agnostic Front or Refused or Hatebreed today?

Every member of Knocked Loose freezes when we say this. They all eyeball each other like it's never crossed their minds.

"That's just…" Bryan stops for a second. "I mean, thank you for saying that. That's wild to consider, we'd love that."

We suspect Knocked Loose's position will only be strengthened with the release of their upcoming third album, *You Won't Go Before You're Supposed To*. Arguably the most extreme-sounding thing they've put their name to, it embraces the most sadistically punishing riffs of their career. All this, while featuring an excoriating/sinister turn from the genre-blurring Poppy on *Suffocate*, and a glass-throated Chris Motionless on the thundering *Slaughterhouse 2* (payback for Bryan Garris guesting on Motionless In White's track, *Slaughterhouse*). Anyone who assumed acclaim would lead Knocked Loose down a more melodic path is in for a shock.

"Honestly, we just want to be the biggest heavy band in the world," shrugs Bryan. "Every record, we're obviously trying to push ourselves to write more complex music. But when you mix that with how heavy we are, the complexities kind of just make it sound scary and chaotic, which I think works really well for us. We want to see how big we can get without sacrificing any of the chaos that our music has."

No Billie Eilish collab on the album, then?

"It's not up to us," Bryan smiles.

Surely you've reached out?!

"I'm sure we could, but ultimately it would be up to her, because that is, essentially, just a really big favour to us," he adds.

Is that stuff a bit weird for you? The Demi Lovato shoutout and Billie watching you at Coachella?

"Nah, I just wish there was a story, but there isn't really," laughs Bryan. "I didn't even see her side stage."

"I didn't either," adds Pacsun. "I didn't know she was there until the video. And I'm glad – I would have shit my britches and dropped my sticks."

At Coachella, playing on a stage with no barrier, they got the entire crowd jumping and flipping. Security were operating a one-in, one-out policy.

"Yeah, they had to cap the tent off when we played," nods Bryan. "A lot of the time, things happen for Knocked Loose and they're so amazing, but you're caught up in the adrenaline of the moment. Then you leave and reflect, and you're like, 'Wow, that was like a big deal.' But I feel like Coachella was one of those times where, while it was happening, I was like, 'This is a moment for this band. This is a huge milestone for this band.'"

Tonight could be another milestone for the band. With food delivered and eaten, we head downstairs to see Knocked Loose, support acts Deafheaven and Headbussa, and members of the crew pose onstage for the traditional 'last night of tour' photo.

One face we didn't expect to see is that of Architects frontman Sam Carter, who has travelled from Brighton.

"I've come up for the big rock show!" he tells us. "I love these guys, they're so great."

With the pictures done, the band amble over, each warmly embracing Sam. More friends in high places for Knocked Loose.

We say goodbye to the band, to allow them to prepare for the show. Stepping out into the rain, we see that even more fans have gathered in anticipation of the quintet decimating the capital.

When Knocked Loose walk onstage, they inspire total devotion and utter havoc. The mania from those in attendance is the sort of thing you've heard people talk about when they hark back to Slipknot's legendary Astoria show in 1999. Bryan transforms from chilled and thoughtful into a screeching, spin-kicking lunatic, while the songs sound crushingly monumental. During a closing *Counting Worms* and *Everything Is Quiet Now*, the crowd singalongs are deafening. Knocked Loose might not be the biggest heavy band in the world yet, but you would be a fool to bet against them.

"I feel like every ceiling that at least *I* expected the band to reach has been blown past," Pacsun tells us, when we ask just how big Knocked Loose could be. "So, I am at a point personally where I don't know what that looks like anymore. Everything's been exceeding these expectations that I set for myself, and then for what I hoped the band would achieve. I'm just blown away by all of it."

Bryan: screecher-in-chief

"Knocked Loose, motherfuckerrrrr!"

"I WOULD HAVE SHIT MY BRITCHES AND DROPPED MY STICKS!"

KEVIN 'PACSUN' KAINE

***YOU WON'T GO BEFORE YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO* IS OUT ON MAY 10 VIA PURE NOISE**

Knocked Loose (left to right): Kevin Otten, Bryan Garris, Kevin Kaine, Nicko Calderon, Isaac Hale

THE CALL OF THE WILD

Knocked Loose have some big mosh calls, alright. But what of those that came before? Here are five of the best

SICK OF IT ALL
Clobberin' Time *(1989)*
Mosh call: 'IT'S CLOBBERIN' TIME!'
One of, if not *the* earliest example of the mosh call came from NY hardcore legends Sick Of It All's debut album, *Blood, Sweat, And No Tears*. After an intro from hip hop star KRS-One, the band chug along before the Koller brothers bawl out the line *'It's clobberin' time!'* and it all kicks off. A rudimentary start, but still killer today.

MACHINE HEAD
Davidian *(1994)*
Mosh call: 'LET FREEDOM RING WITH A SHOTGUN BLAST!'
OK, technically this is part of the chorus rather than a standalone call, but it's influenced countless bands (have another listen to Knocked Loose's *Everything Is Quiet Now*!). With lyrics about federal agents shooting members of the Branch Davidians sect, *'Let freedom ring...'* still has an impact 30 years on.

AT THE GATES
Slaughter Of The Soul *(1995)*
Mosh call: 'GO!'
Melodic death metal isn't strictly known for its bruising mosh calls, but when Swedish kings of the genre At The Gates released their ground-breaking 1995 album, *Slaughter Of The Soul*, frontman Tomas Lindberg managed to make a single raspy *'GO!'* at the start of the title track absolutely iconic. Excellent stuff.

A DAY TO REMEMBER
Mr. Highway's Thinking About The End *(2009)*
Mosh call: 'DISRESPECT YOUR SURROUNDINGS!'
Probably the first mosh call to become a meme. 2009's *Homesick* album featured some of ADTR's biggest songs, but the single most famous moment was when everything stopped and Jeremy McKinnon screamed, *'Disrespect your surroundings!'* before it all kicked off again. The big daddy of mosh calls.

PARKWAY DRIVE
Bottom Feeder *(2015)*
Mosh call: 'YOU CAN'T ESCAPE NOW SNAP YOUR NECK TO THIS!'
Lots of fans grumbled that metalcore stars Parkway Drive had left their hardcore roots behind with 2015's *Ire* album, so it's ironic that it featured such an iconic mosh call. In *Bottom Feeder*, Winston McCall delivered a ferocious *'You can't escape now snap your neck to this!'* before a brutal riff kicked in. Great work, lads.

season of the witch

Raw, abrasive and rage-fuelled, Witch Club Satan are the most provocative black metal band you'll hear this year. But not for the reasons you'd expect

WORDS: HANNAH MAY KILROY • PICTURES: HELGE BREKKE

Even in a scene as boundary-pushing as black metal, Witch Club Satan are radical. While their sound is rooted in raw chaos, it's fuelled by a unique and powerful perspective: female rage. The Norwegian trio take inspiration from injustices aimed at women over generations, reclaiming words that have been used to diminish them – 'witch', 'hysterical', 'whore', among others – to find empowerment within themselves.

"I feel that black metal is a really feminine genre," says Witch Club Satan drummer Johanna Kleive. "Because women have screamed throughout history. Many people who have seen us perform tell us it feels like we scream not just one woman's scream, but every woman's scream."

PRESS/HELGE BREKKE

The three words that make up the name Witch Club Satan all carry meaning, though it's the third and final word that's most associated with black metal.

"Satan, for us, represents a kind of joker figure," says guitarist Nikoline Spjelkavik. "It represents rebellion and freedom."

Formed at the start of 2022 and hailing from different parts of Norway, the trio – completed by bassist Victoria Røising, with all three sharing singing duties, like "a three-headed troll, as we say in Norway" – met via theatre school. They initially had the idea for a project that combined music and theatre.

"We knew there was potential in the energy of the three of us," Victoria says. "After two years of lockdown, we had this explosion that we needed to get out somehow. We found there was only one way to do it, and that was black metal."

There was just one problem – they didn't know how to play the instruments. Johanna had some experience in playing percussion, but they were otherwise starting from scratch. Yet in true black metal style, they didn't let that stop them, and taught themselves to play.

"That is also an act of feminism," Victoria says. "Doing something that we don't know, that we're not really good at, and still having confidence. That feels not typical for women, especially women in their 30s."

Both Victoria and Nikoline grew up listening to black and extreme metal, and felt it was an important part of their identities.

"Coming back to it as an adult has been a bit like discovering myself and my identity again," says Nikoline.

"It feels good to use that energy again," adds Victoria.

For Johanna, whose upbringing was soundtracked by jazz and classical music, it was a whole new field to explore.

"I had to learn from this genre, and learn how to find my voice in it," she explains. "Suddenly I realised it has everything to do with me, and the girls as well."

Witch Club Satan have caught the attention of some of black metal's leading lights. One person who has been following the band since the beginning is Mayhem bassist and co-founder Necrobutcher, whom Johanna refers to as a "mentor".

"We sent him our first demo and he was like, 'This is the most primitive thing I've heard since the 80s,'" laughs Nikoline.

"I think he thought it was so bad in a way, but so pure that he could recognise himself in that," says Victoria.

"He gave us the courage in the beginning to do this," Johanna adds. "He said: 'The black metal scene needs you.'"

"BLACK METAL IS A FEMININE GENRE"

JOHANNA KLEIVE

Witch Club Satan's self-titled debut album was released, fittingly and deliberately, on March 8, 2024 – International Women's Day. It was co-produced by former Satyricon/Celtic Frost guitarist Anders Odden and was released independently, without a label or management – something that was vital for the band.

"We're open to different forms in the future," explains Victoria, "but it was really important for this first album to be us and our project, and to define what we are without any outside influences."

The record itself is a dense, multi-layered whirlwind of blastbeat-laden black metal, eerie spoken word mantras, and moments of ethereal respite, like the beautiful *Mother Sea*. The feminist angle is clear, with songtitles such as *Birth, Wild Whores*, and *Fresh Blood, Fresh Pussy*.

"To be angry women is still very radical for some," says Victoria. "For me it's been a challenge. But it's really freeing, and it's important to use the anger for something you believe is a good thing."

"We want to understand what's inside a woman when she's not being kind and beautiful. We want to deconstruct and open what's inside of her," says Johanna. "It's a big contrast between what you see in a woman and what's inside."

A recurring theme throughout the album is the notion of exploring what it is to be a witch, both on a personal and historical level. The band describe themselves as practising witches, explaining that it means different things to each of them.

"I think we all agree though," Nikoline says, "that we find music to be magic."

The trio researched old witch trials in their local area. The song *Steilneset* refers to the Steilneset Memorial monument in Vardø, Norway, which commemorates the trial and execution of 91 people for witchcraft in the 17th century.

"The historical witch trials were really brutal in Norway," says Victoria. "We feel that the spirits of these witches have somehow come to us. They are telling their stories through our lyrics."

"We all feel like if it was hundreds of years ago, we might have been ones that were picked out as witches," says Nikoline. "Being loud and clear and in contact with nature. So the more we read about it, the more eager we were to speak the words of these women. To really try to hear them, what they would think and say in society today, what they would stand for."

Witch Club Satan are certainly not afraid to stand up for what they believe in politically. *Mother Sea* is about environmentalism, a prayer to the earth to forgive humanity for what it has done to nature. They have dedicated their song *Black Metal is Krig* to the crisis in Gaza, while *Hysteria* calls for listeners to "wake up" to the world around them.

"We really feel like there's a slumbering going on," says Nikoline. "You hear that 10,000 kids are killed and you kind of snooze your alarm. We're all very moved by what's happening in Gaza, we're not afraid of using the Palestinian flag at our shows. If you're making art at this time you have to address the global, you have to show where you stand: that you stand for all human lives and no one should be oppressed."

Nor are Witch Club Satan afraid to take on metal's established hierarchy. They spoke out against Pantera playing at Oslo's Tons of Rock festival in 2023, due to Phil Anselmo shouting "white power" and making a Nazi salute at a concert in 2016. With depressing predictability, it resulted in them being called "fucking feminists" and "woke" online, and even receiving actual death threats.

"The feeling that music should be unpolitical to me feels impossible," says Nikoline. "If you have a microphone and amplifiers, it's powerful. To me, music can never be divided from politics. At its core black metal is punk music; that's how we see it."

They didn't pay much attention to the Pantera backlash ("We like that people have strong opinions about us," says Nikoline). What was more interesting, they say, was when people began to challenge them with regards to the bands they cite as inspiration.

Witch Club Satan scream for every woman

"People say things like, 'What about Mayhem? They have had some really problematic political statements'," says Victoria. "And that is true. Of course it's important to give people another chance, to allow them to change. But then they have to be clear that change has happened."

For Witch Club Satan themselves, it's important to address black metal's connections to the far right and Nazi imagery and ideology.

"It's not really been spoken seriously about," she says. "It's left out of the history. It's problematic, and that's important for us to say. We want this project to be really transparent, not only with our feminist statements, but humanism in general."

"This is a liberation project in many ways," Nikoline says. "And it has to be everyone's freedom that we fight for."

The trio's backgrounds in the performing arts are an important part of what Witch Club Satan do. Nikoline and Victoria run their own company, Lost And Found Productions, which specialises in experimental theatre.

"People wondered if we 'meant it', or if we were doing an art project," says Nikoline. "To us, theatre is serious business. It's an art form that's more real than life itself."

While their ritualistic live shows take inspiration from the aesthetics of black metal, they also unfold into a universe that's all their own, complete with an act structure, blood, gore, costume changes (including nudity), and allowing themselves in a feminist fashion to be really, really ugly. "Like monstrous figures," explains Nikoline.

In keeping with their inclusive nature, Witch Club Satan are planning to build a whole community for fans and like-minded people to congregate – the 'Club' part of their name. They are even writing a manifesto to embody their perspective and ideas.

"As well as our concerts," Nikoline says, "we do sabbaths or meetings with people where we do different things like sing together, have meals together, commemorate witches from the local area. We try to make it a meeting place. And we will continue this and open an organisation you can be a member of. It's exciting. It's for anyone who's interested!"

Johanna smiles as she sums up their ambitions. "We want to create a movement of witches." H

***WITCH CLUB SATAN* IS STREAMING NOW ON SPOTIFY**

witch club satan maths!

The albums that inspired Witch Club Satan

MAYHEM DEATHCRUSH (1987, POSERCORPSE) "It has this brutality and sonic energy. It's so untamed and so raw."

+

NIRVANA NEVERMIND (1991, DGC) "This sums up the soundtrack of our youth, for all three of us."

+

SUSANNA AND THE MAGICAL ORCHESTRA MELODY MOUNTAIN (2006, RUNE GRAMMOFON) "It's covers of Kiss and Joy Division, but deconstructed into something fragile."

+

SUSANNE SUNDFØR THE SILICONE VEIL (2012, EMI NORWAY/ SONNET SOUNDS) "It's pop but with a twist. She's uncompromising with her music."

PRESS/HELGE BREKKE

Gaslamp Quarter
HISTORIC HEART

San Diego State Of Mind

It's been more than 30 years since P.O.D. formed in the city they call 'The Big SD'. As the nu metal survivors gear up to release new album *Veritas*, they give us a guided tour of their hometown

WORDS: JOE DALY • PICTURES: JEREMY SAFFER

Back in the 1990s, National City wasn't the kind of place you read about in the guide books. A mere stone's throw from the touristy enclaves and glittering sands of San Diego's Coronado Island and Imperial Beach, and a 20-minute car ride from Tijuana, across the border in Mexico, the area's nickname reflects its notorious past: Nasty City.

"It's nothing to brag about, but in 1994 this area had a higher crime rate than New York City," says P.O.D. guitarist Marcos Curiel.

Today, taquerias, strip malls and residential neighbourhoods buzzing with vibrant Mexican culture dominate this sweeping region south of downtown San Diego. It's here that we've arranged to meet one of the city's most successful and durable musical exports for a tour of their hometown and the places that have shaped them.

Marcos is first to arrive, greeting *Hammer* with an electric smile and an enthusiastic bro hug. Bassist Traa Daniels, originally a Cleveland native, is next, reaching out with a handshake and a grin, the quiet man of the band. Last to turn up is singer Sonny Sandoval. Humble but prone to laughter, he's a world away from the spitfire figure conducting the mayhem at P.O.D. shows.

The band are gearing up to release their 11th album, *Veritas*. It's their first in six years, and their excitement is palpable. The title is the Latin word for 'truthfulness'.

"We decided we were going to write an old-school style, P.O.D. rock and metal record," says Marcos. "That's what 'veritas' is to us."

P.O.D. have been inextricably linked to San Diego – a city of 1.4 million residents, pristine beaches and mouth-watering Mexican cuisine – since their formation in 1992. Their 2001 song *Boom* included a shoutout to the town they called 'The Big SD'.

Fittingly, our first stop is their old rehearsal space, Sweetwater, an anonymous, three-storey building tucked away in a commercial park a few miles off of Highway 54. The band rehearsed here from 1992 until 1998, paying $500 a month for the privilege.

"This is the scene," says Sonny, gesturing to the building with a flourish. "All the South San Diego bands use this rehearsal spot."

Inside, Sweetwater is a labyrinth of modest rehearsal spaces — glorified storage rooms with padlocks and soundproofing. It's here that they spun the raw material of their rough ideas into something pulsating with power and purpose. Marcos eyeballs the bulletin board on the first floor where P.O.D. and the other bands would post gig flyers.

"This is the first time we've been back in a minute," says Sonny. "It's completely changed. It's corporate now. I mean, it's still 'hood but everything is clean. We thought we'd come back to sticky floors and jacked holes in the wall."

During their time here, P.O.D. released three albums – 1994's *Snuff The Punk*, 1996's *Brown* and 1997's *Payable On Death Live* – via their own Rescue Records, funded by original drummer Wuv Bernardo's father. Then, as now, the band made no secret of their Christian faith, and during that time they built up enough of a buzz to draw a tidy $100,000 offer from a Christian label. Life-changing money for four kids holding down day jobs, but they turned it down.

"We'd been approached by a lot of indie Christian labels and stuff," says Sonny, "but we never felt like that was our scene. We didn't want to be a Christian band. We weren't trying to be the poster child for Christian rock."

P.O.D. (left to right): Marcos Curiel, Sonny Sandoval, Traa Daniels

"WHEN 9/11 HAPPENED, *ALIVE* JUST GAVE PEOPLE HOPE"

SONNY SANDOVAL

"Nothing against those bands," adds Marcos, "but it wasn't what we were called to do."

It's time to head to the next stop, Tribal Clothing, the iconic San Diego streetwear brand whose fortunes are intertwined with those of P.O.D.

"I'll drive," offers Marcos, as we pile into his truck, a dark grey pick-up with two decals on the rear window: a brown and gold decal of the state of California with the letters 'SD' in the middle (the colours are those of the local baseball team, the San Diego Padres), and an image of Iron Maiden's Eddie.

San Diego is a city of contrasts. Along with its chilled surf culture, it's also a military stronghold, surrounded by battleships, fighter jet training bases and a massive armed forces population. Political divisions run deep, as do the cultural divisions across San Diego County, including the music scene. P.O.D. represented one corner of the city's musical triangle.

"The North was Blink-182," says Marcos, "the East was [funk-edge punks] Sprung Monkey and we represented the South Bay."

P.O.D. are one of the few bands to get huge and stay in San Diego.

We park on a side street of San Diego's gritty East Village and pass through a retractable wrought iron gate into the courtyard of Tribal Streetwear, where a grinning, dreadlocked man with a spliff the size of a carrot greets the band with big hugs.

"Tribal is a San Diego based streetwear brand," explains Sonny, who is wearing an on-brand Tribal zip-up jacket today. "They're huge. They've always been good to us, even as a local band coming up, and you'd see that Tribal logo on Cypress Hill and a lot of West Coast groups. You started seeing them on Korn and Limp Bizkit, but because we were homegrown, they were always throwing shirts our way and they always hooked us up, so we were always rocking Tribal."

P.O.D. and San Diego are a package – you don't have one without the other

Local lads: P.O.D. with *Hammer*'s California correspondent, Joe

"There's discontent in it!"

Lamb Of God frontman Randy Blythe on appearing on P.O.D.'s new album

WHERE DID YOU MEET P.O.D.?
"On Shiprocked. Lamb Of God were on it, as well as H.R. from Bad Brains and P.O.D. Just hanging out with those guys, Sonny and Marcos, they were just super-good dudes. You could tell immediately, you know? My girl loved the *Satellite* record, so I bought it and started listening to it, and I was like, 'Whoa, this is great!'"

HOW DID YOU END UP ADDING VOCALS TO *DROP*?
"They just asked me! Ha ha ha! I'm in a heavy metal band so I don't take myself too seriously, but I have to actually like something in order to be a part of it. When someone asks, 'Will you do something with me?', I say, 'Send me a track – if I like it, if I feel like I can add to it, then I'll do it.' They sent me the track, and I was like, 'Yes, sure, I'd love it.'"

WHAT WERE YOUR FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF THE DEMO THEY SENT?
"I heard layers. Like call-and-response stuff. There were already vocals on it. I couldn't hear myself selling the first verse, it's much more skewed to Sonny's style – a bit more hip hop, which I'm a fan of, but I can't sell that. So the second verse, I was like, 'Oh, I can do this.' There's stuff about burning down the system, which is kind of in my wheelhouse. Not 'kind of' – directly! Ha ha!"

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE FINAL VERSION?
"It's awesome. One thing about collaborations like this, I want them to be different from Lamb Of God. Why would I do guest vocals for a band who sound exactly like Lamb Of God? I like the thickness of *Drop*, and I like the message – there's a bit of discontent in it, but with positivity, which is another thing I like about P.O.D. It's dope, man!"

RANDY: PRESS/TRAVIS SHINN

Indeed, P.O.D. returned the love via *Tribal*, the slamming hardcore rap track on their fourth album, 1999's *The Fundamental Elements Of Southtown*.

Inside Tribal, Beyoncé's *Texas Hold 'Em* bumps through the PA. Every wall is arrayed with dazzling graffiti and street art. There's a small stage, offices and a bar downstairs, while 15 different tattoo stalls are located upstairs, along with a DJ booth and founder Bobby Ruiz's office.

Sonny's son Justice tags along and, using his iPhone, films the band giving shoutouts to the cities on their upcoming US tour. As Sonny films a promo, Marcos and Traa munch Cheetos, drink Cokes and make fart noises, accomplishing their goal of making Sonny laugh.

Although P.O.D. pre-dated nu metal, they caught the updraught. Mashing up metal, punk, hip hop and reggae, *The Fundamental Elements Of Southtown* was their breakthrough record. The first P.O.D. album to be released on major label Atlantic, it went platinum in the US, selling more than a million copies.

"I don't think we make a conscious effort to mix this or that genre," says Marcos. "That's just who P.O.D. is. When we start writing, these types of songs just kind of come out."

That success escalated with follow-up *Satellite*, a record that defied the longest of odds. It was released on September 11, 2001, the day of the deadly terrorist attacks on New York's World Trade Center and the Pentagon in Washington DC. By rights, the album should have been dead in the water against that backdrop, but its underlying message of positivity connected with a nation in turmoil.

"[*Satellite*'s first single] *Alive* was already out," explains Sonny, "and it was heading to No.1 on radio and it was No.1 on MTV's *TRL* [*Total Request Live* show], it was giving people hope. When 9/11 happened, that song just stood out. It gave people hope and, with all of our music, it doesn't matter how heavy it is, we always want to be hopeful."

That sense of hope was evident in the album's other marquee song, *Youth Of The Nation*. It was inspired by a school shooting in March 2001 in Santee, San Diego, in which 15-year-old Charles Andrew Williams killed two of his fellow students and wounded 13 more. P.O.D. were in a nearby studio at the time, writing songs for *Satellite*.

"We were two blocks away from Santana High School when the shooting happened. All of a sudden we see ambulances and helicopters and we turned on the news, because there were no smartphones, and we see what's going on."

Propelled by *Alive* and *Youth Of The Nation*, *Satellite* rose above the tragedy that fed into its creation, going on to sell more than three million copies in the US. Both songs remain central to their setlist to this day.

As we poke through t-shirts at the skate shop, a spirited debate erupts: where should we get tacos? Being from North County, *Hammer*'s input is roundly rejected. Eventually, the band settle on a place in the Gaslamp district, a few blocks away.

We arrive at Taco Centro, a bright blue and white taqueria in the middle of the Gaslamp, where a girl behind a tall glass window lays out homemade tortillas on a grill and intoxicating spices arrest the senses. Marcos immediately takes point, stepping up to the register and taking everyone's order.

"I'm going with the 'Mar y Tierra,'" he says as *Hammer* pulls up to the counter. "That's the surf and turf. You won't be disappointed."

We opt for the bean and cheese burrito.

"Vegetarian, huh?" he correctly guesses. "They got nopal here – cactus. It's really flavourful."

Sadly, cactus is a plant too far for *Hammer*. As the cashier rings us up, Marcos waves away our attempt to pay. He treats the whole group.

One person who is conspicuously absent today is Wuv Bernardo, the band's original drummer and co-founder, and Sonny's cousin. According to P.O.D.'s Wikipedia page, he hasn't been a member of the band since 2021. Raising the subject elicits a brief but heavy silence.

"Wuv is not currently in the line-up and he may return or he may never return," says Marcos, making no attempt to hide his sadness. "We're still family, but we're not currently working together."

They won't be drawn any further on the matter (Wuv's place on *Veritas* is taken by studio drummer Robin Diaz). Still, all three core members are understandably enthused by the new album.

"*Circles* was written in a more of an alternative metal/poppy sense," says Marcos, referring to their last album, released in 2018. "We made a decision to be more heavy rock on this."

Previous P.O.D. records have seen them collaborating with everyone from Hatebreed's Jamey Jasta to Bad Brains frontman H.R.. They've hit the contact book again for *Veritas*. Lamb Of God's Randy Blythe appears on opening track *Drop*, while Jinjer's Tatiana Shmayluk guests on *Afraid To Die*.

"Everybody's like, 'What does that mean?'" says Sonny of the latter song's title. "*Afraid To Die* means that I'm standing up for myself and willing to die for what I believe in. And that's true, but the next line actually says, 'Not only am I not afraid to die, I'm not afraid to live.' I'm not afraid of life. So it's really more encouraging and trying to empower people."

Faith has been central to P.O.D. since the beginning. They wear their spirituality on their sleeves, infusing their songs with messages of hope and redemption without succumbing to the preachiness that sometimes characterises other bands who identify as Christian. It's this delicate balance that has allowed them to reach a broad audience, appealing to both secular and religious audiences. Still, the 'Christian band' tag has sometimes been more hindrance than help over the last 30 years.

"We were never Christian enough for the institution of Christians," says Sonny, "but we were too Christian for the secular world. If someone's interviewing me and they ask, 'Do you believe in Jesus?', I'll say, 'Of course!' Because in my neighbourhood, that's not a bad thing. That's not a shameful thing. Dude, we're a rock band! We love God and we love people. People just want a poster child, but you've gotta live your own life, man. We're not choirboys."

P.O.D. are currently a trio, with drummer Wuv out of the picture for now

"WE WEREN'T TRYING TO BE THE POSTER CHILD FOR CHRISTIAN ROCK"

SONNY SANDOVAL

Marcos: guitarist and chief taco appreciator

There's always time for the fans

Wrapping up for the day, we walk past Taco Centro again, where a Mexican family are eating on the patio outside. The father immediately clocks P.O.D. and runs over to shake their hands and ask for a photo with his family. Sonny, Marcos and Traa are happy to oblige – amid beaming smiles and booming laughter, photos are taken, fists are bumped and hugs dispensed.

We turn to leave, heading up the block towards the cars before we realise that Sonny is MIA. Turning around, we see him back at Taco Centro, removing his jacket and draping it across the father's shoulders. He whispers something to him and, before the man can get up, Sonny jogs back over to us.

It's proof of just how enmeshed San Diego is in P.O.D.'s DNA – and vice versa. This city made them, and in return they've been repping The Big SD around the world for more than 30 years. Home? Sure, but more than that.

"This is where we built our character on all fronts," says Marcos. "Culturally, spiritually and artistically. It's part of a culture – the Hispanic culture. A lot of people around the world don't understand it, but it's part of day-to-day life. It's part of the sound! How could we ever leave when that's what we are?" MH

***VERITAS* IS OUT ON MAY 3 VIA MASCOT**

P.O.D. WITH TATIANA: PRESS

"I used to dress like Sonny!"

How Jinjer's Tatiana Shmayluk went from P.O.D. stan to collaborator

HOW DID YOU END UP ON THE NEW P.O.D. ALBUM?
"My husband [Alex Lopez] used to drum for Suicide Silence. When he left, P.O.D. asked him to join as their new live drummer. After a year of him drumming with the band, they reached out to me! When I got asked I almost had a panic attack, because I am a *huge* fan. I'm very into spirituality, so I feel like I almost manifested working with them!"

WHEN DO YOU REMEMBER HEARING P.O.D. FOR THE FIRST TIME?
"It must have been 1999, and I was obsessed. I used to take my CD player everywhere with a stack of CDs, and there would always be a P.O.D. CD. I was quite a tomboy, so I even tried to dress just like Sonny. He doesn't know that, though..."

YOU APPEAR ON THE TRACK *AFRAID TO DIE*. WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE SONG?
"It's catchy! To me, it's in the same vein as their track *Youth Of The Nation*; it's an anthem, very powerful and life-affirming. It's also very nu metal, which I love. My part is small, but I'm so happy to be involved. And the music video is beautiful. It has this post-apocalyptic, *Dune*-y feel to it."

WHAT MAKES P.O.D. SO UNIQUE AND DIFFERENT FROM THE OTHER BANDS FROM THAT LATE 90s/ EARLY 00s GENERATION?
"When I was young, P.O.D. were the most awesome band to me. They had important lyrics, such a unique sound, and they looked so cool. I'd watch their music videos and feel inspired. I feel like they're still making an impact because they're just as awesome as they were back then – as a band and as people. They never lost that nu metal sound, and I still love it!"

PRESS/DERICK SMITH

THE HAMMER INTERVIEW

AL JOURGENSEN

Fleeing a communist revolution, inventing industrial metal, spending 20 years strung out, pissing off Steven Spielberg – the Ministry mainman has done all this and more. Much, much more

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL • PICTURES: DERICK SMITH

Ministry frontman Al Jourgensen's life has been one long, wild ride. Born in Havana, Cuba in 1958, he fled the island as a toddler with his family following a revolution that saw communist insurgent Fidel Castro seize power. Things have barely calmed down for him since.

Ministry started out in 1981 as a besuited synth-pop outfit – albeit against Al's wishes – before changing lanes and laying down the blueprint for industrial metal with such landmark albums as *The Land Of Rape And Honey* (1988), *The Mind Is A Terrible Thing To Taste* (1989), and their big breakthrough, 1992's *Psalm 69: The Way To Succeed And The Way To Suck Eggs*. At the band's height, Al was just as famous for his Olympic-standard pharmaceutical habits – he was a walking chemical dustbin who clinically died three times by his own count.

That sort of thing is in the past now – he's been clean for more than 20 years.

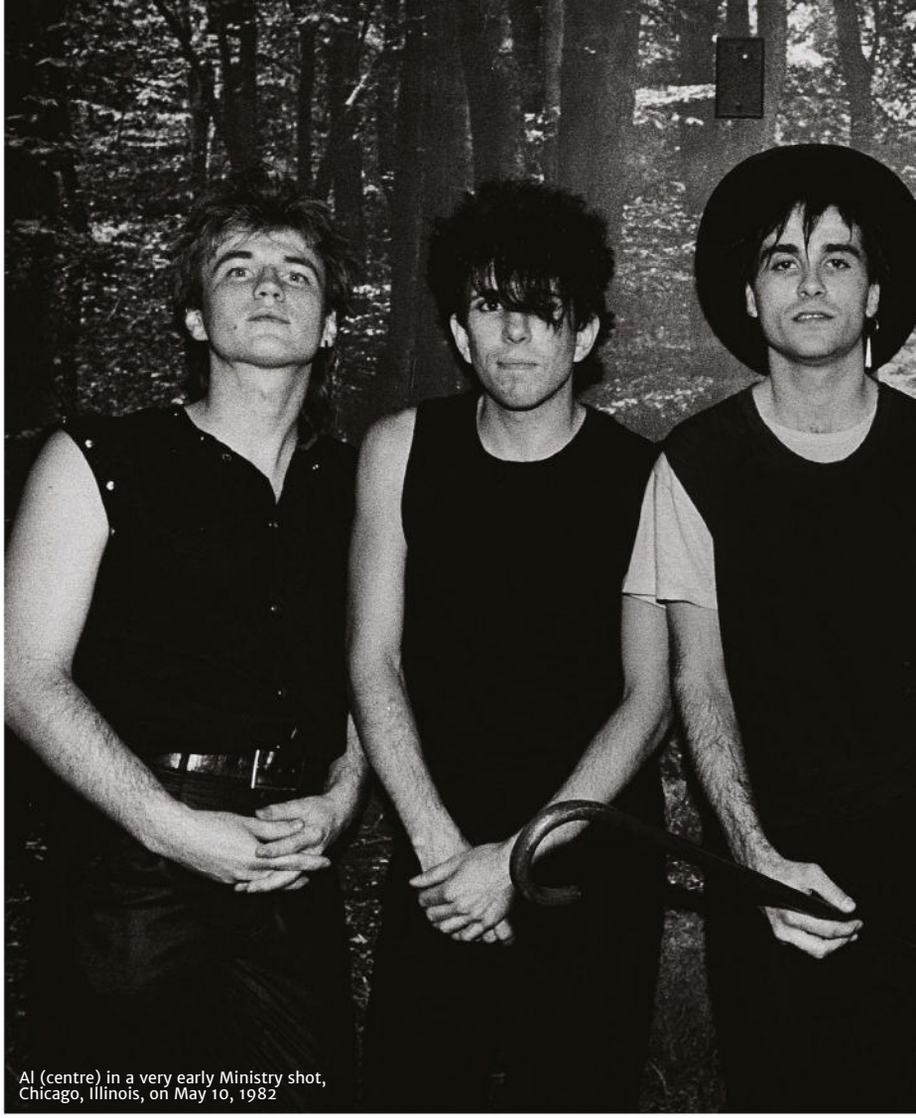
"I figured it's time for me to finally grow up," he says as he sits down with *Hammer* via Zoom.

He looks different.

"I took out all my dreads and piercings," he says. His long, dark hair partially obscures his facial tattoos, though his piercing dark eyes and the sharp, shiny fangs that show every time he laughs raucously at some crazed memory or other suggest he's still the enfant terrible of industrial metal, even at the age of 65.

Ministry have just released their 16th album, the politically charged *Hopiumforthemasses*. He says it's their penultimate record, though the idea of Al Jourgensen swapping life on music's frontline for a quieter existence is hard to imagine.

"I'm actually starting to appreciate some of the things in this world now," he says with a grin, as he prepares to look back on a truly fascinating life.



Al (centre) in a very early Ministry shot, Chicago, Illinois, on May 10, 1982

What was your childhood like?

"I was born in 1958, three and a half months premature with liver damage. So, I came out yellow and deaf in one ear. A blown liver and a blown ear to start. And here I am, 65 years later, still going, 'Fuck you!'"

Do you have any memories of growing up in Cuba?

"Not really. My first memory of life is that the rest of my family had come over to the US. It was just me and my grandmother left, we were some of the last ones out, and the flight was over-packed. I just remember everyone screaming and being nervous about if the plane was even going to get off the ground, because it was so overloaded with migrants. So that was my first memory: sheer terror. I just took it from there."

"I'VE DIED THREE TIMES THROUGH MY OWN SELF-ABUSE"

Ministry's debut album, *With Sympathy*, came out in 1983. You're unrecognisable on that record as the Al Jourgensen of today.

"Yeah, [Ministry's original label Arista] made me cut my hair, made me wear suits. I was all down with it because, at the time, I was living in a squat running two blocks of extension cords just to get heat in an abandoned building. I think I'm the only person that could probably say that they sold out before they started. I've hated that record for years, just on the simple principle that it's not my record and that's not what I signed up for."

You sued to get out of your contract with Arista, and signed to pioneering Chicago industrial label Wax Trax! in 1984.

That seemed like the start of establishing the Ministry sound everyone knows today.

"Oh yeah. Wax Trax! was dominant at one point. We had Front 242, Front Line Assembly, Foetus, Ministry and then my side-projects: Pailhead with [Fugazi singer] Ian MacKaye, and Lard with [ex-Dead Kennedys frontman] Jello Biafra. All the planets aligned. Chicago in the mid- to late-80s was the place to be. It became kind of a Mecca. How could you not be inspired? I sat in my attic, playing guitar and playing with synths, spurred on and becoming more and more confident to be braver and more creative with my music. When I went back to a major label [Ministry signed to Sire in late 1985] there was no looking back, no thought of ever compromising."

***The Land Of Rape And Honey* and *The Mind Is A Terrible Thing To Taste* were pivotal industrial albums. Were you aware of how important they were at the time?**

"We were aware we were different to music that had come before us, for sure. It was this new animal, and it was an unpredictable animal. But I never thought what we were doing was 'important' or any of that bullshit. We were just so full of creativity back then. Musically we were wild, intense, we wouldn't compromise. That's why people took to it."

1992's *Psalm 69*... album was Ministry's big breakthrough. How did you handle success?

"It wasn't what everyone makes it out to be. Glory and fame also has its price, and the price was we didn't know how to handle that kind of success. So we turned to drugs. We were all just complete junkies. It took a toll on your health and your mental stability. We didn't really have time

GETTY

to enjoy our success, we were just waiting on our dealer to show up at the studio. We 'made it' but we were completely falling apart as a band."

There's a story about a Ministry gig in the mid-90s, when you wouldn't go onstage until you scored some heroin. You ended up going on at 2am…
"Yeah, the show in Sheffield. There was a riot because I wouldn't go onstage 'til my dealer showed up! Back then my entire life ran on DST: Dealer Standard Time. I spent almost two decades waiting for my fucking dealer to show up. I didn't watch MTV and go, 'Wow, we're really big!' I just felt really, I don't know… vulnerable, in the sense that my entire life was run on DST."

You also lived with LSD guru Timothy Leary for a while in the mid-90s. What was that like?
"Yeah. I lived with him for about a year and a half, then it got to be too much because he was dying of prostate cancer. He took me, [Butthole Surfers frontman] Gibby Haynes and [late Ministry guitarist] Mike Scaccia into his house. Some of it was fun. He would have these Sunday dinners where we would have, like, multinational corporation billionaires and astronauts and congressmen at his house. I got to meet a lot of really cool people."

Is it true he basically did drug tests on you all?
"Yeah, he would get these experimental drugs and then he was supposed to take notes on what our reaction was. We wouldn't do a pill and wait a couple of hours – we would inject it in his house and he'd take notes. Within a week, Gibby got thrown out because he flipped out and decided to pee all over Tim Leary's desk. Mikey stuck it out for about another two-and-a-half months and just said, 'Dude, I can't do this.' I think I handled it a little bit better."

Why would you subject yourself to something like that?!
"There were things that I needed to see about myself, because they really got you to dive deep on things that are the root of your problems. So, it was almost like therapy for me and so that was good. I stuck it out longer, but basically it got to be more and more like torture."

You got clean in the early 2000s. How hard was it to shake the image of Al Jourgensen as a drug fiend?
"I was really afraid after I kicked it in 2001 of not being able to perform, write music. Then you find your comfort zone and you realise, 'No, the drugs had nothing to do with making you creative.' Over the last 15 years we've restructured our band and crew. Everyone's straight. No one does that shit. I literally take this as a job. I go from my hotel room to the stage, stage right back to the hotel room with the car waiting. I don't get into the after-party things, I don't go out anymore and I'm quite content. I don't need these sycophantic vultures just roaming around you, waiting to pick your carcass clean. I avoid that at all costs."

Some of the Ministry albums you've released since have had very specific political targets: the trio of 2000s albums about George W. Bush, 2018's *AmeriKKKant* inspired by Donald Trump…
"Yeah, how could I not be angry when I saw what Bush pulled off?! He wasn't elected, it was stolen. I was so pissed. I had a three-record set on Bush because he was re-elected, I had three records to play with this fucking guy. When Trump came in he only got one. Now I kind of feel sorry for Bush, because he's also a pawn of who really is running things. It's all dark money and lobbyists, politics are owned, presidents are owned, prime ministers are owned. It's the dark money behind these individuals that really rule everything, whether it's Bush, Trump, whatever."

Is it true that you were invited by the director Stanley Kubrick to be in the movie *A.I.*?
"Yeah, I hung up on Stanley Kubrick three times! I thought it was a prank. His secretary called and said, 'Stanley Kubrick wants to talk to you.' I'm like, 'Yeah, yeah. Fuck off!' Click. The third time he gets on himself. Apparently, he was a fan of some of the stuff we were doing from [Ministry's second album] *Twitch, …Rape and Honey,* and really wanted us to be this band in his soundtrack. After talking to him, I was pretty convinced that was actually Stanley Kubrick. Then he died."

But you still appeared in the finished film when it came out in 2001…
"Well, Steven Spielberg bought the rights, so he inherited me. The original script I got from Kubrick, it was all about male prostitutes and a sleazy section of town, like *Blade Runner.* Spielberg takes it over and the whole focus of this thing is this fucking kid and this teddy bear. So, we're on set for three days and they lined us up to meet him. He gets to me and I'm just like, 'Steve, baby, this is bullshit. Stanley told me this is going to be a porno movie and 'A.I.' stood for Anal Intruder!' And he freaked out."

You've done a lot of covers over the years. Have you ever had any feedback from the artists you've covered?
"I actually got a call from Bob Dylan about *Lay Lady Lay* [covered by Ministry on 1996's *Filth Pig* album], saying how great he thought it was. Neil Young told me, 'You own that song now, just like Hendrix owns *All Along The Watchtower.*' Neil Young told me that! I found out that Ozzy likes our cover of *Supernaut* [the Black Sabbath song, recorded by Al under the name 1000 Homo DJs]. We did a cover of [The Stooges'] *Search And Destroy* – I got a text from Iggy saying, 'Dude,

We can't imagine Al retiring quietly...

"I DON'T NEED SYCOPHANTIC VULTURES ROAMING AROUND"

how did you come up with that one, man?' We only tackle covers when we know that we could do it in our own style; something that they wouldn't have thought about when they were doing it."

You've lost a lot of good friends and bandmates along the way…
"I lost my best friend and my right-hand human being in my life, Mike Scaccia [who died in 2012]. I've lost Paul Raven [former Ministry/Killing Joke bassist, who died in 2007]. It's difficult."

How do you think you managed to survive?
"Why am I here? I don't know, there's no explanation for it. I've died three times through my own self-abuse – defibrillated and everything, been brought back from the dead. It doesn't interest me anymore."

Having faced death so many times, how do you feel about your own mortality?
"I welcome it. During the 90s and the early 2000s, I did not want to be here, I was disappointed the last two times I died. When I came back and realised, 'Oh, fuck, I'm still here.' But now, I have dreams. I go to other planets, I have other lives that are concurrent with mine. I'm not afraid of death."

Where do you think you're going after you die?
"I know I'm going somewhere. When I just moved into this place about a year ago, I did a bunch of 'shrooms and I floated around in my pool and I yelled up at the at the sky and just said, 'You gotta promise me I ain't coming back here again because I've been back here so many times to this planet!' And I heard a voice that just said, 'No, you're moving on. Don't worry. You've conquered your fears, you can move forward.' So I feel good about it, I don't seek death anymore, but I don't fear it because I know that the next place I'm going to is actually better."

You've talked about doing one more album after *Hopiumforthemasses* and then bowing out with Ministry. Why are you calling it quits?
"There's only so far you can go before you bore yourself to death. Do it until you puke, you know? And I don't want to get to that puke point. I'm going to be pre-emptive. I'm working with Paul Barker [former Ministry bassist, who left the band acrimoniously in 2003] again, and we're doing one last album when we're done with the touring schedule over the next year. We had a really good writing relationship in the 90s and we work well in the studio together. I think it's the perfect way to go out, wrapping a bow on the entire Ministry career, doing one final world tour and we're done."

What does retirement hold for you?
"I mean… I can literally retire! There's a certain point where you get to where the music suffers, when you're like, 'Well, we've already done that!' I want to do film scores and activism and things that interest me. I just got done with a documentary, which is a follow-up to *Killers Of The Flower Moon*, with DiCaprio narrating the documentary. I have so much film score work to do right now. I want to retire, but I want to keep pushing and progressing."

***HOPIUMFORTHEMASSES* IS OUT NOW VIA NUCLEAR BLAST**

PRESS/DERICK SMITH

PURULENCY
TRANSCENDENT UNVEILING OF DIMENSIONS

NOKTURNAL
SHADES OF NIGHT

HEMOTOXIN
WHEN TIME BECOMES LOSS

UTTERTOMB
NEBULAS OF SELF-DESECRATION

HOUSE BY THE CEMETARY
THE MORTUARY HAUNTINGS

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WORDS: RICH HOBSON • PICTURES: DEREK BREMNER

SYMPHONY FOR THE

In a dark room, an orchestra strikes up. Violins play a staccato melody, and as more instruments join – a horn here, a crash of drums there – blue lights overhead cast an eerie glow. By the time the music hits a triumphant crescendo, the room is finally illuminated enough to make out the crowd. There's an expected mix of evening dresses, ball gowns, suits and tuxedos, but it's the smattering of Meshuggah, Opeth and other miscellaneous metal shirts that give the biggest hint this isn't your average classical concert.

We're at the Alexela Concert Hall in Tallinn, the capital city of Estonia, for the first-ever performance by Bright & Black. The band are the brainchild of Jacob Hellner – best known for producing the first six Rammstein albums – and artist manager/former A&R rep Per Kviman. For 20 years, the Swedes had been discussing an idea: what if they asked well-known Scandinavian metal artists to compose original pieces of music, which would be performed by an orchestra?

They put their plan into motion in 2018, and Bright & Black's debut record was released in January of this year. Plainly titled *The Album*, it features contributions from Meshuggah's Tomas Haake and Dick Lövgren, Opeth guitarist Fredrik Åkesson, Watain frontman Erik Danielsson and Entombed AD guitarist Nico Elgstrand – that's one hell of a pedigree.

DEVIL

What happens when the producer behind some of Rammstein's greatest hits convinces members of Meshuggah, Watain, Opeth and more to go classical? We went to Estonia to find out

When we meet Jacob the day before the show, his mood is teetering between nervous excitement and fatigue, following a gruelling week of nonstop rehearsals.

"It's been *intense*," he admits with a chuckle, as we sit in the bar of the Nordic Forum Hotel near the venue, alongside his musical co-conspirators – more on them later. "I've had the opportunity to record strings for pop and metal tracks a couple of times, and it's always been super-exciting. At the same time, I didn't want anyone putting on a wig and pulling out their goose feather quills – I wanted it to be authentic."

Enter: Eicca Toppinen. As the leader of Apocalyptica, the Finns who found fame in 1996 with the release of their debut album, *Plays Metallica By Four Cellos* (see 'Metallica Reloaded' box, p.78), he's as comfortable in the classical world as the metal one. He wrote Bright & Black track *Collateral Damage*, and is the group's soloist.

"Eicca was the only person on the planet who could possibly front a thing like this," Jacob admits. "I first saw Apocalyptica opening for Rammstein when we made [2005's] *Live At Brixton Academy* and I was blown away."

"Jacob must have approached me five or six years ago," Eicca recalls. Although front-and-centre of the group, Eicca isn't suffering any pre-show jitters. In fact, other than his long blond hair being windswept and a slight rosiness to his cheeks from dashing across from the Alexela Concert Hall, he exudes a sense of calm, collected cool.

"I'm just here to communicate between metal and classical tradition," he explains. "The orchestra make the magic."

The 40-piece Baltic Sea Philharmonic were founded by Estonia-born conductor Kristjan Järvi in 2008, and their work reinterpreting orchestral music through a contemporary lens has made him something of a rock star in the classical world. Exuberant and charismatic, he is an affable motormouth in the vein of a Corey Taylor or Benji Webbe. Unlike other conductors, who stand rooted with a baton, Kristjan prefers to lead from amid his players, more akin to a hype man ensuring everybody remains on-point.

"We aren't an orchestra playing metal, we're a band that play orchestral instruments," he says, before leaning in conspiratorially. "Would you like to meet the band?"

Standing up, he calls for the BSP to say hello, and the room turns as one to greet us, like a scene straight out of *John Wick*. As Kristjan settles back down at the table, a mischievous grin plastered across his face, we get the sense that his maverick status in the classical world applies to more than just music.

"I've seen a *lot* of institutional orchestras," he says with an air of dismissiveness. "You get the sense that these people really want to do something unique and different, but can't because they're in glass boxes. We're breaking those boxes."

"Be metal, not plastic! The snare drum needs to be nastier! Give me a blastbeat!"

It's 3pm the next day, and we're at the final rehearsal for tonight's show.

Kristjan is pacing the stage like a drill sergeant, making final adjustments. Although Jacob won't be performing, he's still feeling the pressure, recounting how a live show can transform an audience's perception of music. He should know – he almost passed on working with Rammstein until he saw them play.

"The Rammstein demos were pretty crap," he recalls. "But they had a clear vision of what they wanted to do. Rammstein in 1994 were basically doing the same thing they do now – just on a smaller scale. You need conviction; failure simply isn't an option."

Metal's flirtations with classical music are well documented. But while something like Metallica's team-up with conductor Michael Kamen and the San Francisco Symphony on *S&M*, or even Eicca's work in Apocalyptica might seem like obvious reference points, Bright & Black's path hasn't been so linear.

"*S&M* worked because Michael Kamen knew Metallica and had worked with them, so he knew exactly what he was doing when he made the arrangements," Kristjan says. "But he also knew it was basically a PR stunt. *S&M* opened a door, but not many bands have gone through."

Bright & Black's first outing, *The Album*, combines classical music's grandeur and epic scale with the disorienting force and power of extreme metal. Tracks such as *Bloodgrind* and *Armies Of The Preposterous* offer orchestral blastbeats and tooth-gnashing extremity in the realms of black metal, while the likes of *Nidhugg* and Eric Danielsson's *Mounts Of Misfortune* explore a more elegiac, almost gothic sensibility.

"For *The Album*, everyone had their own way of writing," Jacob explains. "Erik wrote everything on guitars that were super-distorted, with shitloads of reverb, and then that's what he gave us. Nico found an orchestra library and basically experimented with things, and that's how *Bloodgrind* came about. Fredrik wrote *Nidhugg* on guitar, and then Nico and I translated it for the orchestra."

One person who isn't struggling to get into the metal headspace today is Eicca. His enthusiasm is infectious, and he headbangs while he plays.

"I had to get all-new cello strings – I've worn mine out before we've even played a show!" he admits as he comes

Not to blow her own trumpet or anything, but...

Kristjan Järvi gets into the spirit of things

It's metal, but not as we know it

Light 'em up!

Worlds Collide: Jacob Hellner, Eicca Toppinen and Kristjan Järvi

"I DIDN'T WANT ANYONE PULLING OUT THEIR GOOSE FEATHER QUILLS!"

JACOB HELLNER

offstage. "It's blown me away just how much power and magic there is."

He also admits he got a positive sign from above after Bright & Black's first rehearsal together in Tallinn. Stepping outside the studio, he looked up and saw the Northern Lights dancing overhead, bathing the sky in hues of green.

"That literally *never* happens," he enthuses. "They were so intense and beautiful, and that's given me confidence that we shouldn't acknowledge anything less than universal acceptance."

For Kristjan, too, the performance has a deep significance. In 1988, during the Song Festival – a traditional event held every five years in Tallinn – Estonians sang national songs in defiance of the Soviet forces then occupying the country. It kicked off a series of events called the 'Singing Revolution', that saw them declare independence in 1991.

"We literally sang and danced ourselves into a country," he says with a chuckle. "But even now, it's really fragile. We thirst for life, not for comfort."

The Alexela Concert Hall is an oddity. Opened in 2009, the 1,829-capacity venue's tinted-glass exterior and wooden-panelled interior are a stark contrast to the maze of cobbled streets, subterranean bars and mediaeval-style taverns that make up the rest of the historical Old Town of Tallinn. But in its own way, the Alexela Concert Hall is making history.

The streets are largely deserted before showtime, and with temperatures dipping below freezing, *Hammer* is forced to duck into one of the taverns. Goblets of Glögg – Estonian mulled wine – are gratefully glugged, though we aren't brave enough to try the bear stew. But as doors open at the Alexela, the city comes alive and punters swarm in.

Backstage, the Bright & Black orchestra are getting ready. Spiked necklaces and studded wristbands are broken out, while black eyeliner and nail polish are liberally shared. One musician wanders past asking if anyone knows how to apply corpsepaint.

"They really want to look the part," Jacob explains sympathetically.

As showtime nears, *Hammer* finds our seats. From utter darkness, *Nidhugg* springs to life with jutting strings and propulsive instrumental swells. Drums clatter with calamitous force while Kristjan paces, hammering along on a traditional Norse shaman drum. During *Bloodgrind*, Eicca strikes a bow across his cello like he's trying to saw it in half. It's gorgeous, dramatic and undeniably metal, the audience torn between a polite but rapt attentiveness, while some appear to be doing the headbanging equivalent of a whisper, furiously nodding along to each new composition.

"This is the biggest metal band you'll ever see onstage," Kristjan quips, before the crowd stand and clap along to closer *And Flesh And Blood*. Its insistent beat is met with increasingly frenzied instrumentation, as Kristjan encourages the musicians to go as hard as they possibly can for a massive – and delightfully noisy – crescendo.

And then, it's over. Downstairs, *Hammer* gauge the reactions from audience members. There's a diverse

The biggest metal band we'll ever see onstage? Kristjan may be right there!

"*S&M* OPENED A DOOR, BUT NOT MANY BANDS HAVE STEPPED THROUGH"

KRISTJAN JÄRVI

spread of ages and musical tastes – there are even families waiting in line to grab merch – but the overwhelming consensus is that Bright & Black are *brilliant*.

"We just love Kristjan Järvi," enthuses Tallinn resident Caira, who's come with her husband, Daron, and is happily brandishing a vinyl copy of *The Album*. "That was a deal-maker for us. Everything he does is so exciting and fresh, and tonight was something completely different to what he's done before – we loved it."

Nervousness banished, Jacob Hellner is beaming. Bright & Black have more shows booked for Stockholm, Berlin and Hong Kong, but then… what next? Is this a one-and-done thing, or will we hear more collaborations from the gang in future?

"I have no idea where this project is going to take us," Jacob admits. "Two years ago, I wouldn't have believed you if you told me we were going to play a show, let alone a tour. But if we ever do a follow-up album, I'll tell you this – it won't be the same."

For now, the band are basking in tonight's achievement – of bringing genres together and coming up with a truly powerful experience.

"Metal is an attitude," says a still-wired Kristjan. "It's an illusion that Beethoven is not metal. Beethoven is metal, Berlioz is metal, Stravinsky is metal… it's an attitude that comes from self-trust and confidence, and we've nailed it." MH

***THE ALBUM* IS OUT NOW**

METALICA RELOADED

Apocalyptica are returning to their *Plays Metallica…* format for a new album – featuring collaborations with Rob Trujillo, James Hetfield and Dave Lombardo. Eicca gives us the inside story

WHAT FIRST INSPIRED THE IDEA OF COVERING METAL ARTISTS USING CLASSICAL INSTRUMENTS?
"I played as part of a six-cello ensemble who would cover all kinds of music. The absolute hardest was Jimi Hendrix, *Purple Haze*. That's actually what got me thinking about Apocalyptica, because it was like, 'If we can play *Purple Haze*, why not *For Whom The Bell Tolls*?' I went to the music shop and bought a music book with all the guitar tabs for *Ride The Lightning*. That's where all our arrangements basically came from!"

THESE DAYS, THERE ARE A FEW BANDS THAT PLAY METAL ON NON-TRADITIONAL INSTRUMENTS. DID APOCALYPTICA MAKE THAT HAPPEN?
"We definitely came at the right time for *something* to change. At the same time as Apocalyptica were coming out, you'd also got a band like Nightwish starting out. The Finnish music scene just seemed super-vibrant; there were a lot of things merging together. I've met loads of people playing electric cellos in other genres that say they were inspired by Apocalyptica."

WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER ABOUT WORKING ON THAT ALBUM?
"How hard it turned out! We figured we'd go into a room with some microphones, play together and that would be it. We played *Creeping Death* together and went into the control room. It sounded fucking *terrible*!' It was out of time, out of tune… There was just so much more work needed to get these things right."

FLASH FORWARD TO NOW… WHAT WAS IT LIKE GETTING MEMBERS OF METALLICA AND SLAYER TO GUEST ON *PLAYS METALLICA VOL. 2*?
"It's great! I've learned in life, even the craziest idea is worth trying. What do you lose? I've become really close friends with the Metallica guys over the years, so it was easy for me to just get in touch and say, 'Hey, we're doing this', and not worry about how they'll respond."

WHAT WAS IT LIKE PERFORMING WITH THEM FOR THEIR 30TH ANNIVERSARY IN 2011?
"That was so great, except for the technical problems! We had been invited on to play *One*, and the backline tech couldn't get any sound out of the cellos. We're there onstage and everyone is waiting and we're dying inside, but then Rob [Trujillo] started to play and entertain the audience, putting on *(Anesthesia) Pulling Teeth*. It was this whole thing, but it was great once we actually got to play."

WHAT DID IT MEAN TO YOU ON A PERSONAL LEVEL?
"The biggest thing for me, being invited to play as part of those shows, was just how Metallica put them on. They were playing very small venues – for them, anyway – and they invited the people who had influenced them. So for Apocalyptica to get some credit for inspiring something for Metallica… Apocalyptica wouldn't exist without Metallica, so that was huge for me. That's one of the reasons we wanted to work with them on this new album, to play some of those songs in a totally new way."

***PLAYS METALLICA VOL. 2* IS OUT ON JUNE 7 VIA BMG. APOCALYPTICA TOUR THE UK FROM SEPTEMBER 29**

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SOLID.

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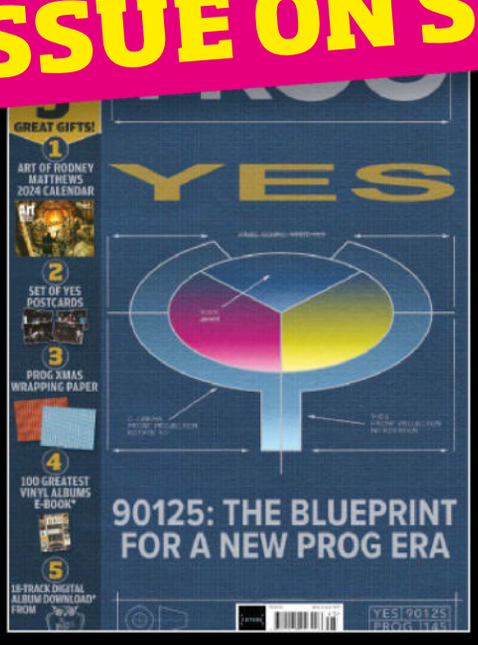

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Kerry King: definitely not mellowing with age

KERRY KING

From Hell I Rise

REIGNING PHOENIX MUSIC

Evil thrash royalty gets back in the ring with a vengeance

RETIREMENT WAS NEVER an option for Kerry King. Even before the untimely passing of guitarist Jeff Hanneman in 2013, it often seemed that Kerry was hauling Slayer along, almost single-handedly, with the ferocious focus and determination of a man with no Plan B and vast quantities of self-belief. Some degree of sheen may have been lost from the launch of his first solo album, thanks to his old band's decision to reform for some lucrative festival performances this year, but make no mistake: *From Hell I Rise* is the sound of a man with absolutely zero interest in fading into the background. It is also the most pissed off and aggressive thing Kerry King has produced since *God Hates Us All* more than two decades ago.

THIS SOUNDS LIKE THE START OF SOMETHING NEW

First things first: *From Hell I Rise* is instantly recognisable as Kerry's work, and similarities to Slayer's most recent material are part of the deal. With Paul Bostaph on drums and Death Angel's Mark Osegueda assuming vocal duties, these furious new songs are rooted in the same dark thrash and groove-driven brutality that typified Slayer's final album, *Repentless*. But again, thanks in part to Mark, *From Hell I Rise* also sounds like the start of something new. As showcased on first single *Idle Hands*, Kerry King is simply steamrollering forward, armed with a thousand riffs and a million things to be seriously fucking annoyed about. This album is so angry, one might worry about its creator's state of mind. But this is Kerry King, so stop your whining and bang your fucking head.

Ultimately, what do people really want from a Kerry King solo album? The album goes for the jugular from the start, slamming

PRESS/ANDREW STUART

the guitarist's retooled identity into our faces and grinning maniacally when doing it. After the domineering overture of *Diablo*, this veteran wrecking crew slam the hammer down and barely draw breath for the next 50 minutes. *Where I Reign* encapsulates the KK ethos. A natural successor to Kerry-penned Slayer songs like *Hate Worldwide* and *Implode*, it provides a jolting dose of remorseless, fat-free, modern thrash, and sets the scene for a sustained and exhilarating act of catharsis, with Kerry as scowling overlord, and Mark as a teeth-spitting, mad-eyed ringmaster.

Throughout, the Death Angel man is a revelation. One of thrash metal's most underrated vocalists, he sounds dangerously angry and unhinged (albeit perhaps on Kerry's behalf), and delivers a vocal performance so venomous and vital that listeners may find themselves recoiling from the speakers in case they get a slap.

Songs such as *Residue*, *Trophies Of The Tyrant* and *Crucifixation* may tell us little that we don't already know about Kerry's songwriting, but a new voice and a renewed sense of purpose have made them fresher and more exciting than anything on the last few Slayer albums. From the seething sprint of *Everything I Hate About You* to the pitch-black triumphalism of the title track, *this* is what people should want and expect from a Kerry King solo album. He's back and he's fucking livid.

FOR FANS OF: Slayer, Death Angel, Enforced

DOM LAWSON

ANCST
Culture Of Brutality
LIFEFORCE

Germany's crust-laden noisemakers grind out another win

Ancst have been incredibly prolific over the past 13 years, and they're still not slowing down or running out of ideas. *Culture Of Brutality* sees them embracing powerviolence and grindcore with glorious results. Twenty tracks totalling just over half an hour career by with barely a change of gear, and when they do, as on the suffocatingly heavy *Vitreous Conformity*, it's just to chug out a meaty beatdown riff. There's still much of their blackened hardcore in here as well, best exemplified on the two-stepping *Beneath These Hills Of Iron*. But in the main, this is a fantastic love letter to Insect Warfare and early 90s Napalm Death.

FOR FANS OF: Magrudergrind, Nails, Weekend Nachos

STEPHEN HILL

ARÐ
Untouched By Fire
PROPHECY PRODUCTIONS

Immersive, doom-laden tales from Northumbria's dark past

Winterfylleth keyboardist Mark Deeks continues his deep dive into the heritage of Northumbria on the second LP from his monastic doom side-project. This time recounting the history of Saint Oswald, a warrior regarded as the most powerful Anglo-Saxon king by his contemporaries in the mid-600s, *Untouched By Fire* is an absorbing and enlightening effort full of dark hymns fuelled by bloody battlefields and family feuds. Featuring cellos; Northumbrian pipes; powerful, prog-speckled guitars and their now signature brooding, baritone choir, the inventive album sees Mark grow as both a songsmith and storyteller, as it takes you on a journey from the stirring *Name Bestowed*, through the solemnity of *Beset By Weapons*, to the stunning *Casket Of Dust*.

FOR FANS OF: Paradise Lost, Mourning Beloveth, My Dying Bride

EDWIN McFEE

SEBASTIAN BACH
Child Within The Man
REIGNING PHOENIX MUSIC

Former Skid Row frontman reaffirms his rock'n'roll chops

Ten years in the making, *Child Within The Man* is as much a slice of Skid Row as it is a chronicle of Sebastian's solo mission, augmented with snarling falsetto vocals and fiery riffs. Rampaging at full-scale finger bleed, the guest slots by John 5, Steve Stevens and Orianthi brim with rock'n'roll octane and Seb's loud, proud arrangements. Elsewhere, the Ozzy-bothering *(Hold On) To The Dream*, the stomping country-slung *What Do I Got To Lose?* (co-written by Myles Kennedy) and the savage, sleaze-coated *Everybody Bleeds* are downright addictive. What could have been a posturing paean to the past is instead a cast iron hard rock record, by a rock legend who still has chops.

FOR FANS OF: Skid Row, Ozzy Osbourne, H.E.A.T

HOLLY WRIGHT

Accept: still metal's end of level bosses

ACCEPT

Humanoid

NAPALM

Teutonic metal linchpins catch the wave of rejuvenation

THE RECENT WAVE of legacy bands striking new gold in their twilight years continues unabated. From cult 80s metal foot-soldiers such as Heavy Load and Overlorde to household names like Judas Priest and Saxon, the killer comeback from rejuvenated boomers is a fully fledged phenomenon of the post-Covid era.

Although now retaining only one original member – axeman Wolf Hoffmann – these wildly influential progenitors of the Teutonic metal sound have maintained a strong path since stabilising in the 2010s.

US singer Mark Tornillo is a textbook exemplar of how to replace a legendary frontman, up there with Dio/Ozzy, Brian/Bon and Dickinson/Di'anno. Equally at home with a husky croon, perfectly deployed on *Ravages Of Time*'s moving, bittersweet meditation on ageing, as with his predominating vituperative bark (oddly reminiscent of ex-Sabbat/Skyclad growler Martin Walkyier crossed with *Sesame Street* optimist Elmo), Mark's gravelly pipes now define the band's sound as powerfully as Udo Dirkschneider's did in their 80s heyday.

2021's *Too Mean To Die* was no slouch, but perhaps betrayed the faintest element of going through motions. On *Humanoid*, however, everything feels just right: the assimilation of quirky, versatile musical ideas into the heads-down, blunt-force riffing, the perfect balance of sound levels, the extra oomph that turns a decent foot-tapper into a compulsive headbanger.

Among the doozies to savour here are Eastern-tinged power metal monster *Diving Into Sin*, Wacken-baiting fist-raiser *Unbreakable*, whisky-soaked rock'n'roller *Straight Up Jack* and propulsive, razor-sharp closer *Southside Of Hell*. Parallels with Priest's *Invincible Shield* are inevitable; both bands trace their roots as far back as the 60s, both exemplify the undying traditions of classic heavy metal, and both have returned with spectacularly energised and commanding records to show the whippersnappers who's boss.

FOR FANS OF: Judas Priest, Motörhead, AC/DC

CHRIS CHANTLER

BISMARCK

Vourukasha

DARK ESSENCE

Norwegian post-metallers cast some new spells over album three

This Norwegian quintet marry the cathartic atmosphere of Neurosis with the resin-soaked grooves of Electric Wizard, for a particularly doomy style of post-metal that stands out from their peers. Similar to the recent Messa album, there's a Middle Eastern folk influence here, most notably on the dark but breezy *Kigal*. Bismarck's home country's most exalted musical export has evidently rubbed off on them too, as the nocturnal weight of *Echoes* eventually breaks out into full-on black metal blasting. For the most part, though, *Vourukasha* is brooding rather than barbaric. Given its disparate influences, it's remarkably cohesive, with a surprisingly cinematic feel despite its brief half-hour running time.

FOR FANS OF: Neurosis, Zatokrev, Slomatics

KEZ WHELAN

BLACK TUSK

The Way Forward

SEASON OF MIST

Savannah, Georgia's sludge maestros up their firepower

After 15-plus years as a single six-string entity, these Savannah sludge veterans have added Chris "Scary" Adams – alongside even newer basist Derek Lynch – and their world has exploded like a cheap firecracker. Black Tusk's triple-vocal, down-stroked sludge has shaken off the humidity, with tracks like *Out Of Grasp* and *Lessons Through Deception* teeming with vibrant muscle and moxie. Scary, his axe-swinging co-conspirator Andrew Fidler and Lynch's massive bass tone all provide a layered sense of sonic density, monstrous riffing and rollercoaster-ride soloing in *Breath Of Life* and *Dance On Your Grave*, and make for all-round awesome stuff.

FOR FANS OF: High On Fire, Crowbar, Mastodon

KEVIN STEWART-PANKO

BRUME

Marten

MAGNETIC EYE

West Coast alt doom voyagers add some strings to their bow

Marten sees these Californians distance themselves from their doom past. It's driven by their expansion into a quartet with the addition of cellist Jackie Perez Gratz, the solemn grace of her strings replacing guitars as the lead instrument. Opener *Jimmy* is as pensive as it is sultry, and dismally deliberate in pace. Lead vocalist/bassist Susie McMullan is a spellbinding force, proving explosive as riffs return to contrast with the cello in the chorus of *New Sadder You*. *Heed Me*'s harsh backing vocals are an unnerving accompaniment to Susie's vulnerable lead, echoing her in tormented repetition over sonorous cello. For those seeking alternatives to the standard doom formula, *Marten* marks a bold new avenue to follow.

FOR FANS OF: Emma Ruth Rundle, Chelsea Wolfe, The Devil's Blood

TOM O'BOYLE

PRESS/CHRISTOPH VOHLER

JOHN CARPENTER, CODY CARPENTER & DANIEL DAVIES
Lost Themes IV: Noir
SACRED BONES

Danceable dread from New York's horror movie legend

John Carpenter's late-career pivot from horror director to bona fide rock star almost feels like the stuff of fiction, but with this fourth collection of *Lost Themes* there's no denying just how real it all is. Despite its title, *Noir* is less about the shadowy monochrome of the 40s and 50s than modern, neon-lit unease. The adrenalised likes of *My Name Is Death* and *Last Rites* are positively bombastic with their slashing guitars and pulsating synths, while *He Walks By Night* recalls John Carpenter's classic *Halloween* motif repurposed to score a breathless, botched heist. Dread oozes from every oily pore, but the results are also highly danceable: a mix of strobe-blasted catchiness and nail-bitten, fear-stink desperation, conjured by three musicians who know exactly how to shred your last raw nerve.

FOR FANS OF: Zombi, Pino Donaggio, Perturbator

ALEX DELLER

CLEARXCUT
Age Of Grief
LIFEFORCE

Classic straight-edge cuts with a righteous pedigree

Featuring former members of Heaven Shall Burn and Implore, CLEARxCUT are now three albums in, and it's clear that they're happy to fully embrace everything you'd expect from a vegan straight-edge band. A strong stance on animal rights and an anarchist ideology are expressed through the sound of cutting, crushing 90s metallic hardcore in the vein of Earth Crisis and Strife. It's a formula that has been road-tested many times, but when the result is this powerful there's no need to go looking around for new ideas. Songs like the slow, crushing, half-time stomp of *Burial Shroud*, the groove-laden *Collecting Scars* and the Slayer-isms-gone-hardcore of *Putrefaction* all sound brilliant – a mix of raw, chest-beating aggression and genuine emotional heft. It's a combination that makes *Age Of Grief* such an engaging listen. Old dogs, same old tricks, but what excellent tricks they still are.

FOR FANS OF: Earth Crisis, xCanaanx, Buried Alive

STEPHEN HILL

COGNITIVE
Abhorrence
METAL BLADE

New Jersey's deathcore deviants expand their arsenal

Having joined the prestigious Metal Blade ranks, New Jersey's Cognitive have stepped up on their finest effort to date. While the current trend in deathcore is to focus all on a swooping breakdown, *Abhorrence* attempts to bring in different elements, giving most of the tracks a distinct character not often seen in this realm. Guitarists Rob Wharton and Harry Lannon exchange technical but discernible riffs throughout, opting for jarring notes on the frantic *A Pact Unholy* and gorgeous leads on *As The Light Fades*. As well as the typical deathly growls and screams, Shane Jost also manages to conjure multiple personalities through his varied vocal approach, from the cleans on the opening title track to the wretched cries akin to Cattle Decapitation's Travis Ryan.

FOR FANS OF: Whitechapel, Suicide Silence, The Voynich Code

ADAM BRENNAN

CRAWL
Altar Of Disgust
TRANSCENDING OBSCURITY

Swedish death metallers look beyond their HM-2 pedals

It almost seems redundant to mention this death metal quartet hail from Sweden, as that much is immediately obvious as soon as that buzzing HM-2 guitar tone oozes out of opener *Undead Crypts*. Much like Black Breath, Crawl combine that classic Swedeath sound with a healthy dose of hardcore punk energy. But this second album also introduces a subtle black metal flavour, with the combination of deathly bluster and eerie tremolo riffing on tracks like *Curse Of The Morbid* recalling prime Necrophobic. Crawl prioritise aggression over atmosphere for most of *Altar Of Disgust*, however, with shorter tracks like *Knives* and *Enslaved In Filth* almost hitting grindcore tempos while dishing out gloriously knuckleheaded riffery. *Altar Of Disgust* isn't exactly groundbreaking, but it's more robust than the band's debut, and a satisfyingly solid slab of death metal.

FOR FANS OF: Entombed, Black Breath, Necrophobic

KEZ WHELAN

Alien Ant Farm: still sounding fAntastic

ALIEN ANT FARM
~mAntras~
MEGAFORCE

California's alt metal mischief-makers jump back into the fray

AT THE HEIGHT of the early 00s' nu metal boom, it was Alien Ant Farm's tongue-in-cheek cover of Michael Jackson's *Smooth Criminal* that temporarily turned the California veterans into one of the hottest bands in rock. Twenty-three years later, as they return with their first album in nine years, not only is it still one of *the* best rock covers of all time, it remains their commercial peak.

With the nu metal revival currently in full swing, it would be easy to view this well-timed reunion through cynical eyes, but in truth, the tag never felt like a comfortable fit. There was always more going on in AAF's sound than they got credit for, with reggae, pop punk, alt rock and even jazz, courtesy of drummer Michael Cosgrove, simmering in their sonic blend. All of this is on display as opener *The Wrong Things* rolls in on sun-dappled guitar and drums. That said, nostalgia is big business, and *~mAntras~* is swimming in it. Most of these tracks don't even pretend to chase modern trends. Dryden Mitchell's voice, which still sounds remarkably crisp and distinctive, immediately unlocks a million teenage memories. *Last dAntz* sounds like the band's vastly superior 'other' hit, *Movies*, mixed with the glitz and the glam of early The Killers, while singles *Fade* and *So Cold* are both equal parts Papa Roach and Incubus with earworm choruses.

Tellingly, it's when the band try to step out of their comfort zone that things become messy. The album's closing title track descends into a tangle of percussion, overlaid vocals and rapping, which sounds like two songs playing at the same time. It doesn't work, but doesn't ruin what is an enjoyable comeback.

FOR FANS OF: Papa Roach, Incubus, P.O.D.

DANNII LEIVERS

PRESS

Eye: Jessica Ball presents an entrancing new vision

EYE

Dark Light

NEW HEAVY SOUNDS

MWWB frontwoman reveals her atmospheric alter-ego

AS VOCALIST FOR prog-stoner voyagers Mammoth Weed Wizard Bastard – now re-christened MWWB – Jessica Ball provides a sweet, blissful counterpoint to the space-time-continuum-warping riffs the Wrexham quintet peel out. Eye is a new venture for the singer/songwriter, a collaboration with her partner Gid Goundrey that experiments with a celestial mix of dreampop, electronica and shoegaze. It's a smorgasbord of elements merging, with Jessica's ethereal vocals acting as a navigation point.

It's safe to say this album wouldn't feature in this magazine were it not for the singer's other band, but that doesn't mean *Dark Light* is devoid of ideas that may interest those of a more metallic persuasion. There's a dark, moody ambience to the arrangements that vividly conjures echoes of Chelsea Wolfe, Marissa Nadler and even touches of Depeche Mode. At its core, *Dark Light* is an album of quiet restraint, the aural equivalent of ocean waves gently lapping at the shore in low tide.

Respair is an album highlight, its bright, shimmery guitar line contrasting with the darkened reverberating synths below. Melodies gently interweave, and reach a bittersweet climax that suggest there's hope to be found beyond the darkness. Elsewhere, *In Your Night*'s droning synth gradually integrates guitars, ghostly harmonies, and delicate drum patterns leading to a funereal strum of distorted chords. There are times, however, where *Dark Light* cruises where it should soar, and while subtlety is a quality that shouldn't be underestimated, some tracks leave little to no impression at all.

Dark Light creates a mood that languishes in a beautiful kind of melancholy, one that is sumptuous in its composition, if a little one-note in its delivery. But if it's a darkened, melancholic ambience you seek to create, Eye will provide just that.

FOR FANS OF: Chelsea Wolfe, Darkher, Mazzy Star

REMFRY DEDMAN

CROWNSHIFT

Crownshift

NUCLEAR BLAST

Finnish supergroup find a bland common denominator

Despite Crownshift being a new outfit, they are brimming with pedigree. They include guitarist Daniel Freyberg (ex-Children Of Bodom), bassist Jukka Koskinen (Wintersun/Nightwish) and drummer Heikki Saari (Finntroll), rounded out by frontman Tommy Tuovinen. The keyboard- and (sometimes) string-stacked metal of this project's debut album certainly reflects the members' CVs. However, each song seems written by committee, stripped of the personality that made those original bands so distinct. Although *A World Beyond Reach* flaunts Daniel's talents, and *To The Other Side* boasts a progressive scope, nothing else feels urgent, while Tommy's vocals lack character. On this evidence, Crownshift are unlikely to build a legacy of their own.

FOR FANS OF: Children Of Bodom, Bleeding Through, Arch Enemy

MATT MILLS

DÅÅTH

The Deceivers

METAL BLADE

Atlanta's progressive death metallers make a welcome return

2024 marks 14 years since death metallers Dååth's last, self-titled album. In the early 2010s, their mix of huge grooves, extremity, progressiveness, sense of melody and symphonic elements made them an exciting and promising proposition. It's a big ask to come back after so long away and compete with contemporary metal, but *The Deceivers* is a decent way to end their hiatus, re-introduce themselves, and potentially pick up a new audience. All the things that were good about Dååth are still here: ominous and savage riffs, some truly wonderful lead guitar parts, and an intoxicating sense of grandiosity in the more symphonic moments. A very solid return.

FOR FANS OF: Children Of Bodom, Psycroptic, Rivers Of Nihil

STEPHEN HILL

EL MOONO

The Waking Sun

LOCKJAW

Brightonian genrephobes pack their debut with menace and meaning

'I'm fucking done with waking up!' wails Zac Jackson on *The Waking Sun*'s title track, signalling this quartet's focus on uncomfortable topics. The song's diatribe about depression sparkles with a charisma and swagger that has made them one of the UK's most ensnaring prospects. Body dysmorphia is thrust into the spotlight on the incredible *Haunting*, while *Screw Loose* copes with self-medicating when you've reached the end of your tether. Pairing arena-sized riffs with an intensity that befits more intimate venues, El Moono are impossible to pigeonhole, and while the back half languishes compared to the front, *The Waking Sun* needs to be heard.

FOR FANS OF: Deftones, Sugar Horse, Arcane Roots

JACK TERRY

PRESS/REN FAULKNER

FEUERSCHWANZ
Warriors
NAPALM

Medieval folk metallers make a bid for international acclaim

For the first time in their 20-year career, Feuerschwanz have recorded a selection of their best-loved tracks in English. Of course, the Germans run the risk of creating an uncanny experience when venturing into a foreign tongue, but thankfully that's not the case here. Delving into their old tracks might highlight that the band have always been a bit silly, but their commitment to stein-clanking, horn-raising heavy metal is emphatically not. Making the likes of the insanely catchy *Highlander* accessible to a new cohort of people is a smart move, and new song *The Unholy Grail* slots in nicely among *The Forgotten Commandment (Das Elfte Gebot)* and *Memento Mori*. *Warriors* is a treat for diehard fans, and a solid introduction to the unanointed in search of their next folk metal fix. See you in Valhalla.

FOR FANS OF: Sabaton, Subway To Sally, Schandmaul

CATHERINE MORRIS

FOLTERKAMMER
Weibermacht
CENTURY MEDIA

NYC's symphonic black metallers look on the bright side of bondage

Featuring members of Imperial Triumphant and Kilter, the second album from this symphonic black metal outfit is almost a mirror image, contextually, of 2020's *Die Lederpredigt* ('The Leather Sermon'). Whereas that debut talked about an evil, dominatrix goddess inflicting untold suffering on humanity, *Weibermacht* ('Female Power') portrays a similar character yet takes sado-masochism seriously and responsibly; sex positivity is in abundance here. Songs like *Leck Mich!* and *Algolagnia* are powerfully conveyed not just through Andromeda Anarchia's operatic vocals, but her demonic screams. Meanwhile, the frenetic tremolo picking of Zachary Ezrin and Darren Hanson provides a suitably dark and menacing foundation. If you like your music to be a little 'out there', Folterkammer have plenty to offer.

FOR FANS OF: Imperial Triumphant, Cradle Of Filth, Carach Angren

ELLIOT LEAVER

FULL OF HELL
Coagulated Bliss
CLOSED CASKET ACTIVITIES

Seemingly incapable of sitting still, this Maryland extreme metal outfit have had a very productive 12 months. Following a trio of genre-pushing collaborations last year – including their earth-shattering pairing with Primitive Man, and the soaring *When No Birds Sang* with shoegaze heroes Nothing – their sixth studio album displays their sponge-like quality for growth and evolution. Their ability to fuse aural excess with an atmospheric restraint makes tracks like the jazz-tinted *Malformed Ligature* hit even harder, while the blunt-force trauma of monolithic sludge/doom centrepiece *Bleeding Horizon* is one of their most crushing moments to date. Terrifyingly animalistic with surprises at every turn, *Coagulated Bliss* is unmistakably Full Of Hell without sounding like anything they've produced before, and is another benchmark performance from a band that continue to blaze a trail through everything in the vicinity.

FOR FANS OF: Nails, Thou, All Pigs Must Die

JACK TERRY

GATECREEPER
Dark Superstition
NUCLEAR BLAST

Arizona's deathly desert rats make a great leap forward

Widely earmarked for greatness after the release of their 2016 *Sonoran Depravation* debut, Gatecreeper have established themselves as the modern era's most potent purveyors of Stockholm-meets-the-desert death metal. They may have taken their sweet time to produce a full-length follow-up to 2019's rapturously received *Deserted*, but *Dark Superstition* is every inch the strident, big label debut. Produced by Converge's Kurt Ballou, this is a more diverse and daring record than Gatecreeper's old-school reputation might suggest. The mid-paced pummelling of *The Black Curtain* is gritty and melancholic like early Paradise Lost; *Superstitious Visions* is doomy rock'n'roll with a brittle, hardcore heart; *Caught In The Treads*' thunderous, folk-tinged call-to-arms is crushing and uplifting in equal measure. Next level of death, effortlessly achieved.

FOR FANS OF: Dismember, Amon Amarth, Frozen Soul

DOM LAWSON

SMALL MERCIES

Where EP is short for 'Epic Potential'

DEAD FLESH
Dehumanise EP
SELF-RELEASED

This Hertfordshire quintet's debut EP is a raucous, uncompromising showcase of deathcore riffs and breakdowns, spearheaded by the bile-filled, anti-establishment cry of *Bodies Upon Bodies*. Whitechapel and Aborted fans, take note.

ELLIOT LEAVER

DEADAUDIOSAINTS
Deadaudiosaints
SELF-RELEASED

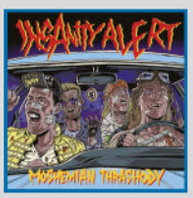
Straight outta Yorkshire and counting Nine Inch Nails, Muse and Placebo among their influences, this trio's pulsating space rock blend feels decidedly nostalgic, which, on the crunchy *Jaded* and *Yourself*, is no bad thing.

DANNII LEIVERS

GRADIENCE
Ironsight
SELF-RELEASED

This Danish duo deliver a pummelling blow of trap-infused metal on their debut. From the synth-tinged, blackened *This Abyss* to *Blindsided*'s deathcore onslaught, *Ironfist* is a tease of Gradience's gristly potential.

EMILY SWINGLE



INSANITY ALERT
Moshemian Thrashody
SEASON OF MIST

These Austrian thrashers return with more super-charged parodies of old favourites. Tackling tracks from GN'R, Maiden, Queen and erm, George Michael, this gloriously silly EP raises the tempo while lowering the tone.

EDWIN McFEE

MY FAVOURITE NEMESIS
We Annihilate
SEEK & STRIKE

We Annihilate starts off with cutting vocals and strong melodic leads. But these Finns struggle to find their identity, introducing disjointed droning synths, and a whiplash-inducing number of key changes.

CHERI FAULKNER

RIVERS OF NIHIL
Criminals
METAL BLADE

While we await a full follow-up to 2021's extraordinary *The Work*, three songs of sophisticated progressive death will suffice. Anchored by huge hooks, *Criminals* sees Adam Biggs embrace lead vocals with aplomb.

ADAM BRENNAN

Knocked Loose prepare a stealth run at the mainstream

KNOCKED LOOSE

You Won't Go Before You're Supposed To

PURE NOISE

Kentucky's hardcore high-risers ride their own crazy train to the summit

IN THE FIVE years since Knocked Loose released their second album, *A Different Shade Of Blue*, they've gone viral on TikTok about a billion times, played to a packed-out tent at Coachella festival, been name-checked by Demi Lovato, and been watched from the side of the stage by a headbanging Billie Eilish. So, with the mainstream rolling over to have their tummy tickled by the Oldham County, Kentucky hardcore crew, this is the moment where Knocked Loose embrace the pop world so enamoured with them, sand down all those rough edges, make a more melodic, palatable album and turn their back on the scene, right? Wrong.

There are lots of impressive aspects about *You Won't Go Before You're Supposed To*. In a scene full of identikit grunters, Bryan Garris has a frankly bizarre high-pitched vocal, yet manages to achieve crystal-clear enunciation of his lyrics while simultaneously sounding like he's being mauled by a grizzly bear. Drew Fulk's production gives the record perfect definition while making it sound as loud as a jet plane taking off inside your cranium. Then there are the odd little flights of fancy, such as on the Radiohead-esque opening of *Take Me Home*, that few other hardcore bands would have the ingenuity to attempt.

The *most* impressive thing about this album, though, is that, when faced with the opportunity to capitalise on being hot shit in the mainstream and maybe becoming the most unlikely pop stars in history, Knocked Loose have made the heaviest, most punishing and destructive album of their career.

Highlights are plentiful. The frighteningly chaotic *Suffocate*, featuring guest vocals from Poppy, and the hellishly stabbing nightmare of *Blinding Faith* deserve a mention, but Knocked Loose really never miss here. The mainstream has no idea what's about to hit it.

FOR FANS OF: Jesus Piece, End, Harms Way

STEPHEN HILL

HAUNTED

Stare At Nothing

RIPPLE MUSIC

Italian doom magicians stir the ethereal and the atavistic

There's an appealing contrast of temperatures throughout this Italian doom quartet's first album in six years. A radiant warmth and snuggly fuzz infuse the low-end grooves, baking like Kyuss in a desert jam. Then after the sirocco riffs there's a cold snap, and an icy goth chill has you reaching for your The Third And The Mortal hoodie. Haunted bang these weather fronts together in a wholly uncontrived and beguiling way. The album constantly demands your attention with eccentric new angles on atavistic impulses. Witchy, ethereal ululations over churning doom riffs with shoegaze-y breakdowns aren't new, but the chemistry and woozy atmospheres make this a deeply satisfying slow ride.

FOR FANS OF: Bauhaus, The Gathering, Electric Wizard

CHRIS CHANTLER

HAUST

Negative Music

FYSISK FORMAT

Nordic punk rockers head back to their raucous roots

Almost a full decade after their last album, *Bodies*, Haust are back with their original line-up. If 2015's *Bodies* found them incorporating more of a moody post-punk influence – much like their peers Okkultokrati's *Raspberry Dawn* – then *Negative Music* finds them returning to the balls-out hardcore fury of their early days. Haust sound much more invigorated here, with vocalist Vebjørn Guttormsgaard Møllberg pitched somewhere between Maniac and Darby Crash on ripping cuts like *Dead Ringer* and stompier, Poison Idea-esque rockers such as the brutish *Turn To Stone*. While *Negative Music* lacks the surprise factor of their last album, it makes up for it with liberal splashes of piss and vinegar.

FOR FANS OF: Okkultokrati, Kvelertak, Poison Idea

KEZ WHELAN

IMMINENCE

The Black

BELIEVE

Swedish metalcore mob strike a resonant chord at last

It's taken Imminence a hot minute, but they've finally realised what makes them special. The Swedes' previous four studio albums wasted too much time tinkering with overly polished production and the kind of atmospheric metalcore that Architects left behind six years ago, but here they have taken a step forward. At times, they're still swamped by their influences, but by centring these songs around the violin playing of vocalist Eddie Berg, their sound has taken on a haughty, mournful and symphonic dynamic that immediately elevates tracks like *Come Hell Or High Water* and the blistering *Come What May*. Closing with the white-hot title track and the fully instrumental *Le Noir*, Imminence are finally showing signs of creating something unique.

FOR FANS OF: Architects, Currents, Invent Animate

DANNII LEIVERS

PRESS/BROCK FETCH

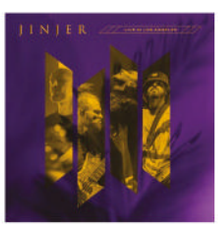
INTER ARMA
New Heaven
RELAPSE

Richmond's alt sludge outfit set their sights on the cosmos

Inter Arma are one of the underground's most cherished bands, but *New Heaven* is the biggest evidence yet of something new about them: they're crackers. 2019's *Sulphur English* anticipated the mood of the Covid years by being bleaker than *Blood Meridian* as directed by Ingmar Bergman, and yet this finds them beaming through the galaxy, 70s prog synthesisers in hand. The riff in the title track is fucked, plain and simple, while T.J. Childers' drums in *Violet Seizures* slap you through a wormhole. Mike Paparo is really singing more now, embodying a mad-eyed doomsayer through *Gardens In The Dark*. Cosmic death metal isn't new, but no one has had the crazed idea of somehow filtering that through bluesy Americana before… probably because no one else could and have it sound this natural.

FOR FANS OF: Yob, Blood Incantation, Artificial Brain

PERRAN HELYES



JINJER
Live In Los Angeles
NAPALM

Ukrainian rising stars imperfectly capture a statement of resistance

Jinjer's 2022 US dates were a big deal. The tour was the Ukrainian djent stars' first since their future was cast into doubt by the Russian invasion of their country earlier that year. Now, new live CD/DVD/Blu-ray *Live In Los Angeles* immortalises the final show of that comeback run, held at the Wiltern Theatre. There's a lot that's powerful about the recording, from an erratic lightshow to singer Tatiana Shmayluk dedicating *Home Back* to those fighting back home. However, a muddy mix stops the footage from becoming a spotless spectacle, with drummer Vladislav Ulasevich sounding like he's smacking motorcycle helmets for 80 minutes. Guitarist Roman Ibramkhalilov and bassist Eugene Abdukhanov occasionally rise above the murk, but when everyone's raging at full tilt it's hard to discern the technical prowess that's made Jinjer modern metal darlings.

FOR FANS OF: Meshuggah, Periphery, Vildhjarta

DANNII LEIVERS

LIGHTWORKER
How The Beautiful Decay
SOLID STATE

San Fran metalcore trio still looking for the true spark of inspiration

These days it takes a little more than a screams vs cleans dynamic to get on the metalcore ladder, but with bands like Dying Wish, Spiritbox and Svalbard taking the genre to ever more progressive heights, the bar is being raised higher than ever. It's a hurdle that Lightworker have struggled to clear on their second album, although that's not to say *How The Beautiful Decay* is a poor record. Opener *Hellscape* is all gluey grooves and spiralling guitar, and guitarist Grayson Hurd seems to have a bottomless pit of frenetic riffs at his disposal. Meanwhile, vocalist Joe Calderon carries the anthemic choruses of *First Light* and *Burn Scar* with aplomb. But there's nothing here that we haven't heard before, and while not every album needs to reinvent the wheel, proficiency isn't enough to stand out in an increasingly crowded scene.

FOR FANS OF: The Ghost Inside, Fit For A King, Bury Tomorrow

DANNII LEIVERS

LIKE MOTHS TO FLAMES
The Cycles Of Trying To Cope
UNFD

Ohio's metalcore masters seek out a personal evolution

Having dabbled in djent-y riffs and a softer approach, Like Moths To Flames returned to their hard-hitting metalcore roots for 2020's *No Eternity In Gold*. That trend continues here, with seismic breakdowns, varied vocals and tight, technical drumming. *The Cycles Of Trying To Cope*'s four chapters – Limbo, Fracture, Dissociate, and Melancholia – serve as a narrative arc for frontman Chris Roetter's emotional journey, as he seeks out silver linings amongst his own dark clouds. Where their peers often venture into cheesy, stadium rock territory, LMTF perfect the formula with anthemic, melodic choruses accompanied by catchy hooks and swirling, intricate riffs that never risk sounding repetitive. Unapologetically heavy, punctuated by brief respites of clean singing, ambient synths and dynamic guitars, *The Cycles…* marks LMTF as one of the best metalcore bands around.

FOR FANS OF: Currents, Silent Planet, Alpha Wolf

CHERI FAULKNER

Linkin Park find themselves in a reflective mood

LINKIN PARK
Papercuts: Singles Collection 2000-2023
WARNER

Alt metal revolutionaries get ill-served on their greatest hits collection

ONE OF THE great many 'what ifs' left in the wake of the tragic events of July 20, 2017 comes in the shape of Linkin Park's evolutionary journey. *One More Light*, the final album released before the death by suicide of frontman Chester Bennington, marked perhaps the most surprising about-turn in the career of a band who, for all their nu metal pigeonholing, have never been afraid to spread their creative wings. In forgoing bruising alt rock for deft electro-pop, it pointed towards a more diverse, nuanced future direction: an intriguing latest chapter in one of modern metal's most interesting stories.

Friendly Fire, a *One More Light*-era cutting-room discovery given life here for the first time, marks the undoubted highlight of *Papercuts*, the first 'greatest hits' compilation to appear under the LP banner. Hearing Chester's voice come to life once more on the lyrics *'Staring right into the darkness / Through an empty open door'* is a moment of true poignancy in a package that otherwise falls disappointingly short.

Sure, this open-top bus ride through the Linkin Park catalogue serves up all the big hitters you'd expect. Save for 2014's stodgy *The Hunting Party*, every album is reflected in its 20 tracks. But recent tendencies to reissue classic records with exhaustive extras, as the band have done superbly with *Hybrid Theory* and *Meteora*, highlights the paucity of must-have bonuses on offer here. *Friendly Fire* aside, 2006 archival rarity *QWERTY* gets a first official release, but even that track is no stranger to diehards. Do we really need *Numb* in both its original and Jay-Z mash-up forms?

Favouring a scattergun track listing above a chronological one only serves to weaken the offering further. Rather than becoming a fascinating document of Linkin Park's movements through the stylistic gears over the passing years, it reduces *Papercuts* to being little more than a playlist set to shuffle. A missed opportunity.

FOR FANS OF: Bring Me The Horizon, Korn, Papa Roach

SAM COARE

PRESS/JAMES MINCHIN

OU have opened up a new frontier on planet prog

OU
II: Frailty
INSIDEOUT MUSIC

Devin Townsend-approved prog metal wonderment from China

WHEN WAS THE last time prog metal was truly progressive? Complex? Naturally. Challenging? Sure. But in terms of genuine, boundary-pushing sonic adventure, it's been eating its own tail for a while. That's what makes Beijing's OU – pronounced 'O' – so exciting. Their first album slipped in under the radar midway through 2022, but those who were listening clocked it was something unique and not a little special. Musically, it piled on the knotty riffs and time changes, but it had something else in singer Lynn Wu. Like Björk singing in Mandarin Chinese, she spiralled and swooped around the high registers, creating something unworldly and unlike anything else out there right now.

Devin Townsend certainly thought so; modern music's maverick-in-chief signed up to co-produce this follow-up. *II: Frailty* takes everything that was so great about its predecessor and amplifies it. Opening song *Frailty* sets delicate piano chords against a shifting rhythmic backdrop running from tricksy to intense, the latter courtesy of drummer, and ex-pat American, Anthony Vanacore. But it's Lynn, floating gracefully over the top, who takes it somewhere stranger and more unsettling.

OU frequently sound like they've beamed in from the 25th century, where this kind of thing is more normal. *Purge* – featuring backing roars from Devin – is art metal made for clubs with blinding white walls and where vividly coloured drinks float in on metal trays. *Redemption* is a slow sunrise of a song. Most brilliantly outlandish of all is *Recall*, its layered, birdlike vocals colliding with a percussive backing that manages to be hypnotic and disorientating at the same time. It sounds like AI music created by flesh and blood humans.

How this stuff will work live remains to be seen – OU have yet to play a gig. But with *II: Frailty*, they've tunnelled through prog metal's complacency and opened up a strange new world of their own.

FOR FANS OF: Devin Townsend, Björk, Polyphia

DAVE EVERLEY

MARISA AND THE MOTHS
What Doesn't Kill You
SELF-RELEASED

All-conquering catharsis from the UK's alt rockers

What Doesn't Kill You is stunning. In a dazzling display of catharsis, these dynamic alt rockers traverse the depths of trauma and emerge with heads held high. Marisa Rodriguez's candid lyrics are delivered with equal measures of sanguine tenderness and an assured, bruising malice. Versatile soundscaping only elevates her performance, be it the triumphant and climactic strings of *Devil You Know*, the frazzled, grunge-y bite of *Wither Away* and *Fake It Till You Make It*, or *Straight-Laced*'s acoustic vulnerability. *Gaslight's* contemplative *'When will I be good enough?'* is answered by the mere existence of this album; Marisa Rodriguez is a superstar.

FOR FANS OF: Halestorm, Evanescence, Audioslave

EMILY SWINGLE

NECROPHAGIA
Moribundis Grim
TIME TO KILL

Legendary gore gurus salute a fallen figurehead

Cheered on by the late, great Frank 'Killjoy' Pucci from beyond the grave, Necrophagia's remaining members have rustled up a fitting farewell. Stitched together from Killjoy's unfinished, final recordings, a deranged live version of 2013 single *The Wicked*, new takes on songs from seminal 1987 debut *Season Of The Dead*, and a scabby-knuckled cover of Samhain's *Halloween 3*, *Moribundis...* is rough around the edges and smothered with hot offal. With only eight tracks, two of them instrumental interludes, this barely qualifies as a full album. But with Incantation's John McEntee filling in the vocal gaps on the new material, and the classic *Mental Decay* sounding more bestial and crazed than ever, it's a perfectly pitched tribute to a true titan of terror.

FOR FANS OF: Autopsy, Macabre, Acid Witch

DOM LAWSON

RAISED BY OWLS
Vol.3: (The Satirical Verses)
SELF-RELEASED

Derbyshire jokers bring serious riffs to their celebration of silliness

Silly songs about stupid subjects aren't for everyone. But for those without giant broom handles lodged up their arses, Raised By Owls' brutal buffoonery is the perfect antidote to all those earnest young bands singing about war, injustice and their bloody feelings. Always heavier and nastier than expected, these goofballs have all the tech-death precision they need to make jokes, both musical and lyrical, and hit their intended targets like hurled machetes slicing through a dartboard. From the cheerfully violent *Dance Like Barney Greenway*, to the priapic speed squall of *Strictly Come Danzig*, this is ripping extreme metal that just happens to be very silly indeed.

FOR FANS OF: Lawnmower Deth, Car Door Dick Smash, Blood Duster

DOM LAWSON

WORLD SERVICE

Heavy metal uprisings from around the globe

ATER
Somber
TORQUE

Djent can usually do with being nastier, so Chileans Ater taking the eight-string doom of Meshuggah's *Nothing* and layering in a bit of albeit rudimentary black metal is at least a step to something more vital.

PERRAN HELYES

NOKTURNAL
Shades Of Night
PULVERISED

Hailing from Indonesia Nokturnal mix black and death with a rawness that's typical for their home country. Less typical is that it's transcended by a luminous, Watain-esque sense of melody.

OLIVIER BADIN

OBSCURIAL
Heretic
MEMENTO MORI

That this quintet hails from Kuala Lumpur, or "muddy confluence" in Malay, is apt. This is seething OSDM, log-jammed with crunchy chugs and gushy whammy action, churning in an Incantation-indebted chaos-froth.

SPENCER GRADY

PRESS

SELBST
Despondency Chord Progressions
DEBEMUR MORTI PRODUCTIONS

Elevated misery from Latin America's black metal maestro

Latin American one-man BM band Selbst made a big impact with 2020's *Relatos De Angustia*, a labyrinthine journey into N's personal hell. *Despondency Chord Progressions* delves deeper into both N's misanthropy, and his musicality. *La Encarnación De Todos Los Miedos* continues where *Relatos...* left off, as riffs form hypnotic patterns battled over by contrasting leads. *When True Loneliness Is Experienced* is a slower burn, with unexpectedly stadium-sized solos at its apex. *Chant Of Self Confrontation* is a seething spire of sadness elevated by N's clear-throated baritone. *Between Seclusion And Obsession* has a Latin instrumental flare. Such extravagances add more personality and a broader spectrum of despair. *Despondency...* expands Selbst's palette while retaining its integrity, ultimately turning tragedy into triumph.

FOR FANS OF: Imha Tarikat, The Ruins Of Beverast Deathspell Omega

TOM O'BOYLE

SIX FEET UNDER
Killing For Revenge
METAL BLADE

Death metal whipping boys try to run on their Achilles' heel

Early criticisms of Six Feet Under – going back to their mid-90s origins and glory years – pertained to the simplistic, lunk-headedness of their material. As they have soldiered on through members and phases, Six Feet Under have shifted from caveman favourite to a dynamic musical force, inclusive of a cadre of well-schooled death metal luminaries and shredders. Criticism these days involves the band's most glaring weakness: vocalist and lone original member, Chris Barnes. When *Know-Nothing Ingrate* and *Ascension* peel off 90s Floridian riffing via precision guitars, machine-gun kicks and on-a-dime stops and starts, it's certainly engaging – until Chris opens his mouth, that is. His wafer-thin, uni-dimensional sputter is devoid of phrasing, feel or attention paid to the context of the songs that, overall, shoots *Killing For Revenge* in the foot.

FOR FANS OF: Cannibal Corpse, Jungle Rot, Deicide

KEVIN STEWART-PANKO

SLASH
Orgy Of The Damned
GIBSON

Iconic axe-slinger offers a star-studded tribute to the blues

Slash's sixth solo outing is a rollicking tribute to the blues. Again summoning a jaw-dropping battery of vocalists, *Orgy Of The Damned* reinvents 12 blues classics as electrifying modern anthems. Brian Johnson and Steven Tyler (on harmonica) team up for a raucous rendition of Howlin' Wolf's *Killing Floor*, while *Crossroads* see the audaciously flashy duo of Slash and Gary Clark Jr. blow the doors off the Eric Clapton version. The pantheon of legendary voices includes Chris Robinson, Paul Rodgers, Billy F. Gibbons, Demi Lovato, Iggy Pop and Chris Stapleton, who sets *Oh Well* ablaze with his bourbon-soaked vocals and a funked-up fever dream of acoustic and electric grooving. Blues tributes often choke on their own reverence for the genre; Slash proves that in the right hands, the blues can still be a hell of a lot of fun.

FOR FANS OF: Clutch, Led Zeppelin, Michael Monroe

JOE DALY

SONIC UNIVERSE
It Is What It Is
EARMUSIC

Living Colour's former frontman channels funk metal's golden era

More than three decades since the glory years of funk metal, one of the scene's leading figures returns with a new project. Corey Glover was renowned as the frontman of Living Colour, and his voice still sounds as instantly recognisable all these years later in Sonic Universe. Their debut album pulls plenty of tricks from the blueprint laid out by the likes of Corey's previous band, as well as Extreme and Infectious Grooves, albeit with mixed results. Opening track *I Am* is a crotch-thrusting humdinger of a song, and the riff, hook and glorious Motown-style backing vocals of *My Desire* are instantaneous and undeniable in equal measure. Unfortunately, the album does meander a little too much and runs out of puff by the end, but at its best Sonic Universe are a glorious throwback to the early 90s.

FOR FANS OF: Living Colour, Fishbone, Urban Dance Squad

STEPHEN HILL

P.O.D. report for nu metal revival duty

PRESS/ALICIA HAUFF

P.O.D.
Veritas
MASCOT

San Diego's nu metal originals make a diminished return

NOSTALGIA IS BIG business in 2024 – just look at the success of the When We Were Young and Sick New World festivals for proof. There's never been a better time to be an early 00s nu metal band. Being a throwback 'greatest hits' novelty act is not a game P.O.D. seem content with playing, however. *Veritas* arrives as, somewhat remarkably, their 11th full-length album, albeit their first in six years.

It wasn't worth the wait. Album opener *Drop*, 'starring' Lamb Of God's Randy Blythe in a cameo that's underplayed to the point of obscurity, is a mess of stylistic handbrake turns that hamstrings *Veritas* from the off, and from which it gamely spends the next half-hour attempting to recover. It tackles such a task, to its credit, by going hard. There's a tight groove to *I Won't Bow Down*, and *Afraid To Die*, with its scene-stealing melodic turn from Jinjer's Tatiana Shmayluk, sits in the snuggest of pockets. Body Count fans will appreciate *I Got That*.

Front and centre, as ever, is vocalist Sonny Sandoval. He retains an impressive power and dexterity to his delivery, yet the words that tumble from his mouth shift meaninglessly between the banal (*'Keep it one hundred cuz the struggle is real!'*), the derivative (*'We get one life. Let's go!'*) and, well, whatever *'Let it rock! Let it rock! Let it rock! Till you drop!'* is. These are emojis as lyrics. They do a man who undoubtedly has a more interesting story and outlook to share no justice whatsoever.

It was perhaps too much to expect P.O.D. to dramatically reinvent or reinvigorate their sound. Rather than offering anything new or of note, *Veritas* serves as a poor facsimile of what once conjured excitement around the band's name all those years ago.

FOR FANS OF: Body Count, Alien Ant Farm, Limp Bizkit

SAM COARE

Pain have gone in search of industrial inspiration

PAIN

I Am

NUCLEAR BLAST

Peter Tägtgren's industrial-metal project goes big on the gothic anthems

NEARLY THREE DECADES and nine albums in, Pain are now not so much a side-project as a permanent vehicle for mainman Peter Tägtgren's electro-metal urges, that sometimes gets left in the garage. *'Why so serious / Why so furious / Don't push me, I don't want to grow up,'* he sings on *Push The Pusher*, and it's certainly a different tone to Hypocrisy's studious death metal. Pain have always had a darkly lustrous sense of sardonic gothic fun, but this time out it's even more overt.

Originally released during lockdown, *Party In My Head* steals its verse structures from Neil Young's *Rockin' In The Free World* and threads them into a huge party anthem. Peter has described *Go With The Flow* as his 80s Depeche Mode song, and it fits the bill with its high-energy beat, big chorus and wobbly banks of synth. You can go too far with the shenanigans, however. *Not For Sale* rides a Rammstein-sized groove and deals with themes of integrity, but you really can't exhort The Man to *'Suck my balls'* without the spectre of Eric Cartman demanding that you respect his authority.

There are also some gloomier moments, of course. The title track starts with the line, *'There's no hope in the valley of death,'* and takes a slower, more atmospheric musical tack – although they still can't help but swell up with a big, breaking refrain. Similarly, *The New Norm* casts a cynical eye over the state of the modern world and brings in a brief touch of death metal aggression. *Revolution* mixes heavy distorted riffs and stuttering electronica with tightly controlled bursts of noise, but the default sound remains a highly polished dose of hook-laden industrial-metal, tempered with those ever-present banks of synths. *I Am* is not an album filled with surprises, but it is a lot of fun.

FOR FANS OF: **Deathstars, Zeromancer, Lindemann**

PAUL TRAVERS

SVNEATR

Never Return

PROSTHETIC

Canadian black metallers refuse to look back

Following the buzz around 2021's *Chinook*, *Never Return* sees Svneatr looking to reach more ears with the backing of Prosthetic. For all its nods to Immortal's freezing blasts and Darkthrone's raw insolence, the band's third album crackles with exhilarating tangents and ambition. The title track and *Omen* employ regal leads and bombastic rhythms to balance their unsettling descents, while the feverish *Blackout* runs into a fiendish, synth-led gothic overture. Nothing is more perversely curious than centrepiece *And When Comes The Storm* and closing track *Reaper Of The Universe*. Combining debilitating, nefarious moods and vocals with epic soundscapes, soothing passages and duelling riffs, they epitomise the album's brave impetuosity.

FOR FANS OF: **Master's Hammer, Enslaved, Ihsahn**

ADAM BRENNAN

SYK

EarthHFlesh

SEASON OF MIST

Italian noise/djent collective retreat from their own potential

Syk's 2022 *Pyramiden* album was a real gem. For 38 minutes, the Italian extremists presented a novel noise/djent soundscape, casting imposing rhythm guitar against atonal leads, incessant percussion and Julie Christmas-esque vocals. The band have undergone some seismic shifts since, and sadly, the new line-up answers the question: what if Meshuggah were boring?' All of Syk's prior idiosyncrasies have been replaced with stock impressions of vocalist Jens Kidman and guitarist Fredrik Thordendal, just without the mind-blowing drumming of Tomas Haake. *EartHFlesh* roars and chugs for your attention, but it isn't half as worthy of it as its predecessor.

FOR FANS OF: **Meshuggah, Jinjer, Vildhjarta**

MATT MILLS

UNCLE ACID & THE DEADBEATS

Nell' Ora Blue

RISE ABOVE

Cambridge's cult retro obsessives take a left-hand turn

This sixth album may well be for these Sabbath-obsessed troubadours what *Obscured By Clouds* was for Pink Floyd. It's not quite a full album, but the soundtrack to some imaginary Italian exploitation film from the late 60s. The 19 tracks are, for the most part, performed by Uncle Acid head honcho Kevin Starrs alone, but they also include various dialogues in Italian, featuring original *Django* star Franco Nero. You wander through this mostly instrumental curio full of crispy vintage keyboards and distorted fuzz as if through some old dusty, maze-like museum after midnight, in a dream-like state yet without any clear direction, but it can still be an occasionally immersive meander.

FOR FANS OF: **Goblin, Pink Floyd, Ennio Morricone**

OLIVIER BADIN

PRESS

UNEARTHLY RITES
Ecdysis
PROSTHETIC

Pissed-off, crusty death with no bright side

Even by grubby, old-school standards of much modern death metal, Unearthly Rites are a joyously disgusting proposition. *Ecdysis* is so raw and uncompromising it makes Sanguisugabogg sound like Symphony X. Finnish death metal has always had plenty of punk spirit: *Deep Drilling The Earth's Crust* and *Capitalocenic Nightmare* are furious polemics set to some of the filthiest, most bilious brutality in recent memory. Sometimes, UR are so venomous and vile that they recall Necrophagia at their horrified, DIY best. At others, *Ecdysis* plumbs sludgy, dissonant depths, as excruciating doom collides with a blast-powered, white-knuckle noise attack, and nobody gets out alive because of the climate-wrecking, capitalist fuck-heads. Alive with righteous indignation and as charming as a weeping sore, this is the crustiest metal record of the year so far.

FOR FANS OF: Necrophagia, Obliteration, Ascended Dead

DOM LAWSON

UNLEASH THE ARCHERS
Phantoma
NAPALM

Adventurous power metallers enter the realms of artificial intelligence

The sixth outing from these Canadian power metallers is a high-minded concept album bursting with dystopian reveries of a world enthralled by AI and its digital landscape. Spearheaded by Brittney Slayes' powerhouse vocals, *Ph4/NTomA* and *Blood Empress* unleash a high-octane blend of proggy fretwork and pounding grooves that glisten with a sumptuous production. Other elements emerge on the synthwave-infused *Gods In Decay* and the monster balladry of *Give It Up Or Give It All*. The band integrated AI into their writing process as both a thematic cornerstone and an ambitious foray beyond the realm of traditional production. Grand in scale and boasting a vast emotional range, *Phantoma* is an arresting journey and a futuristic vanguard that suggests where heavy metal might go as the world enters the dawn of artificial intelligence.

FOR FANS OF: Kobra And The Lotus, Styx, Rhapsody Of Fire

JOE DALY

URZAH
The Scorching Gaze
APF

Bristol's progressive sludge crew don't pull their punches

Urzah's debut album combines sludge and progressive influences with trace elements of metalcore. Riffs bite as hard as the urgency of vocalist Ed Fairman's bark. *I, Empyrean* is a brash opener, as intense verses lead to airy, twinkling choruses. It's a short-form of later, more expansive explorations. *Immateria Noir* sees their progressive elements flourish, its azure melodies offsetting the heft of the rhythm guitar. *A Storm Is Ever Approaching* kicks things back into high gear with a galloping intro giving way to a gratifying, squall-addled chug. With the album culminating in the 15-minute, undulating odyssey *Thera I/II*, Urzah have crafted a weighty, accessible debut that is equal parts experimentation and gut-punch gratification.

FOR FANS OF: Mastodon, Gojira, Cave In

TOM O'BOYLE

WHEEL
Charismatic Leaders
INSIDEOUT

Anglo-Finnish progressive metallers perfect the art of nuance

On their third full-length, Anglo-Finnish prog-metal outfit Wheel have honed the formula that's made them such a promising prospect since 2019's *Moving Backwards* album. Underpinned by drummer Santeri Saksala's baffling but impressive polyrhythms – just try to figure out how to headbang to opening track *Empire* – the band have always excelled at creating complex progressive metal. But crucially, the prevalence of strong melodies on *Charismatic Leaders* means the record doesn't end up falling short of its own grand ambition. *Submission* is vast and expansive, leaving room for dynamics and breakdowns that keep you firmly in the flow of its 10-plus minutes. *Porcelain* dials back the rhythmic intricacy in order to shine a light on singer James Lascelles' ear for vocal hooks, while *Disciple* is probably the best example of Wheel's songwriting in 2024: infectious, rousing, and dazzlingly well-crafted.

FOR FANS OF: Karnivool, Tool, Leprous

CATHERINE MORRIS

Pallbearer have transcended their doom origins

PALLBEARER
Mind Burns Alive
NUCLEAR BLAST

Arkansas' doom heartbreakers unfurl the power of fragility

LOOKING TO THROW your heavy metal claws aloft and mindlessly bellow "Yeaahhhhh!" at the rafters? That's fine and all, but chances are this is not the doom you are looking for. *Mind Burns Alive* is Pallbearer's most expansive and atypical work to date, and while the band have long exhibited restless, wayward traits, they've largely been kept in check by the steady whip hand of doom traditionalism. Here, on the band's fifth album, that resolve is beginning to waver. They've not done away with the crunch entirely, but quiet restraint is now the name of the game, and those thumps to the back of the head are tempered by prog, synths, sax and slowcore.

Not unlike Patrick Walker's journey from Warning to 40 Watt Sun, Pallbearer have managed to maintain a sense of pile-driving emotional weight, even when the music murmurs. Cuts like *Daybreak* and the title track combine elegant riffing with soft, whispered croons that wouldn't sound out of place on a Codeine or Galaxie 500 record, while the shimmer-edged *Signals* speaks to the blurry post-hardcore of Hum, Failure and major-label Cave In.

If these sounds are at least in keeping with the album's overriding themes – loneliness, isolation and spiralling disbelief in the face of a world that threatens to consume you – then others are more surprising. A slick 80s sheen coats much of the album, greasing Brett Campbell's vocals, slip-sliding into AOR-infused solos, and pooling into a plush jazz meltdown with *Endless Place*.

Bizarrely, the mix is a triumphant one, and by the time 10-and-half-minute closing track *With Disease* rolls around, you're not just intrigued but wholly invested: shoulders flexing, heart thudding in your chest, and willing those wending vocals to soar ever closer to the sun, even if it means disaster. Heck, maybe we do need that mindlessly bellowed "Yeaahhhhh!" after all?

FOR FANS OF: Khemmis, Katatonia, 40 Watt Sun

ALEX DELLER

PRESS

LIVE REVIEWS

JUDAS PRIEST

SAXON / URIAH HEEP

WEMBLEY ARENA, LONDON

Birmingham's unyielding metal champions bestride the ages

"THIS ONE IS *Rainbow Demon*, it came out in '72," says Uriah Heep frontman Bernie Shaw to an already near-full arena. "Who remembers that?" A large proportion of the crowd by the looks of it. There's a case to be made that a rejuvenated Judas Priest have missed an opportunity to showcase and build a bridge to metal's next generation in their choice of supports. But as Rob Halford will tell the crowd later on, this is a "true heavy metal package", and one that allows the band to share their extended, half-century celebrations with their British peers. More than that, it's also a means to put Priest in context, both in terms of the scene they emerged from, and the one they helped create.

Formed in 1969, the same year as the headliners' first incarnation, **URIAH HEEP** were initially stirred in the cauldron of acid blues and proto-metal that spilled over into Priest's *Rocka Rolla* debut. But if the band name has an aura of must about it, an opening *Save Me Tonight* is remarkably bright-sounding, its classic, pulldown-inducing hard rock stirred by Phil Lanzon's keyboards, while melodies spread as if they're dropped onto blotting paper. It's the early material that really draws you in, though. The mantric groove and organ swirls of *Rainbow Demon*, the riff in *Hurricane* ("This is how heavy metal sounded in the early 70s") churning up strands of DNA that would resurface in both Maiden and Motörhead, and the relentless glam-pilfered stomp running throughout a closing *Easy Livin'* are waves of earthy power spreading through the venue, even if the parping *Land Of Hope And Glory* outro is a bit… much.

SAXON's intro is somewhat more ominous, but it's a prelude to the kind of steel-plated masterclass that's long been their live stock-in-trade. Surprisingly, this is their first time at Wembley – with a noticeably acrid edge, Biff Byford tells the tale of a support slot here with Rainbow rescinded as they arrived at the venue – but the likes of *Motorcycle Man* and *And The Bands Played On* are tailor-made to fill out every corner of places like this, and Biff's voice is still an emphatic foghorn blast. That the three new songs fit so seamlessly into the set is another breaking of the law of diminishing returns, and a closing run of classics – *747 (Strangers In The Night)*, *Denim And Leather*, *Wheels Of Steel* and *Princess Of The Night* – are as much in-the-moment jolts as they are marker points in metal's long, gloried timeline.

Uriah Heep: musty by name, brilliant in nature

THE SET

JUDAS PRIEST

Panic Attack
You've Got Another Thing Comin'
Breaking The Law
Rapid Fire
Sword Of Damocles
Love Bites
Saints In Hell
Crown Of Horns
Turbo Lover
Invincible Shield
Sinner
The Green Manalishi (With The Two Prong Crown)
Painkiller

ENCORE

The Hellion
Electric Eye
Hell Bent For Leather
Metal Gods
Living After Midnight

Supposedly, at some point, this founding generation of giants will be gone, but it's heavy metal's intrinsic attitude of defiance and belief in triumph over the odds that keeps moving the horizon back out of sight. For all the health trials various members have had to endure in recent years, the sheer, celebratory verve that runs through every fibre of **JUDAS PRIEST**'s latest, 19th album, *Invincible Shield*, feels like an inevitability. When they launch into its opening track, *Panic Attack*, with Richie Faulkner and Andy Sneap's voracious riffs bristling like arachnid limbs over a city skyline, and Halford's banshee wail in full force, it feels as though a fundamental law of metal physics is being reasserted, put beyond doubt by the following *You've Got Another Thing Comin'*.

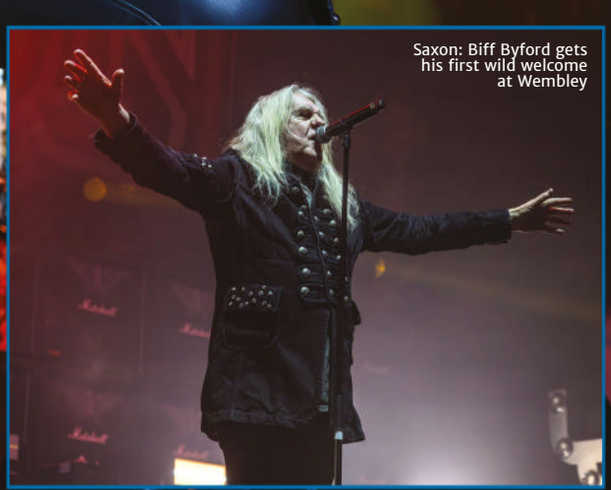
Production-wise, there's nothing superfluous – a four-panel video screen at the back of the stage, and a neon-framed trident hovering above, descending in alien visitation style as *Invincible Shield* itself mainlines on that classic, fuel-injected torque. Priest have always embodied the thrill of *momentum* and if Halford may not quite have the swagger of old, he's still our guardian, the endless costume changes from glittered coats, through leather, lamé and tassels, to a patch-festooned battlecape, carrying a regality worthy of the Metal God. Hearing *that voice* live in full, tectonic plate-shifting effect remains an incomparable experience, each vocal blast hunched over and expelled like an elder dragon still unleashing balls of fire.

As huge as they sound tonight, there's both a recognition of Priest's roots, and an acknowledgement that this is a band that belong to every age. The screens reveal footage of Birmingham's impoverished, industrial past, before transforming into a distressed Union Jack and scenes of riots during *Breaking The Law*, while *Living After Midnight* rocks out under modern-day, night-time cityscapes to underline its ever-replenishing, adrenaline-charged rush.

An extended call and response of "Whoa, yeah"s with the crowd is part battle cry, part celebration of a communal bond. From the lesser-played likes of *Love Bites*, through *Turbo Lover* – complete with Halford in full-regalia motorbike entrance – to a stone-tablet encore of *Electric Eye*, *Hell Bent For Leather*, *Metal Gods* and *Living After Midnight*, it's a continuous rolling forward of the years. And with founding guitarist Glenn Tipton joining them for the final two tracks, it's a 'fuck you' to Parkinson's disease and a reaffirmation of the unbreakable core that runs through 50 years of heavy metal. Still the masters, still invincible.

JONATHAN SELZER

Richie Faulkner and Rob Halford: forever in leather



Saxon: Biff Byford gets his first wild welcome at Wembley

KEVIN NIXON

SKINDRED

P.O.D.

WEMBLEY ARENA, LONDON

MOBO award-winning ragga metallers host a life-affirming celebration

SUCH IS THE buzz for the return of Californian nu metallers **P.O.D.** that their billing tonight feels like a double headliner. Though they've released a further six albums since their 2001 smash hit *Satellite*, all eyes and ears are on golden oldies *Boom*, *Youth Of The Nation* and *Alive*, which are played with all the nascent energy they had when they were first released. However, with their first full-length in six years, *Veritas*, looming on the near horizon, it's not all about baggy-panted nostalgia tonight. Kicking off their set with its opening track – the explosive *Drop* – P.O.D. sound confident and relaxed as they effortlessly groove through their set. There's no mistaking Sonny Sandoval's resonant and commanding raps, and Traa Daniels' downtuned bass licks hit hard. It's a stirring reminder of nu metal's distinctive, enduring legacy.

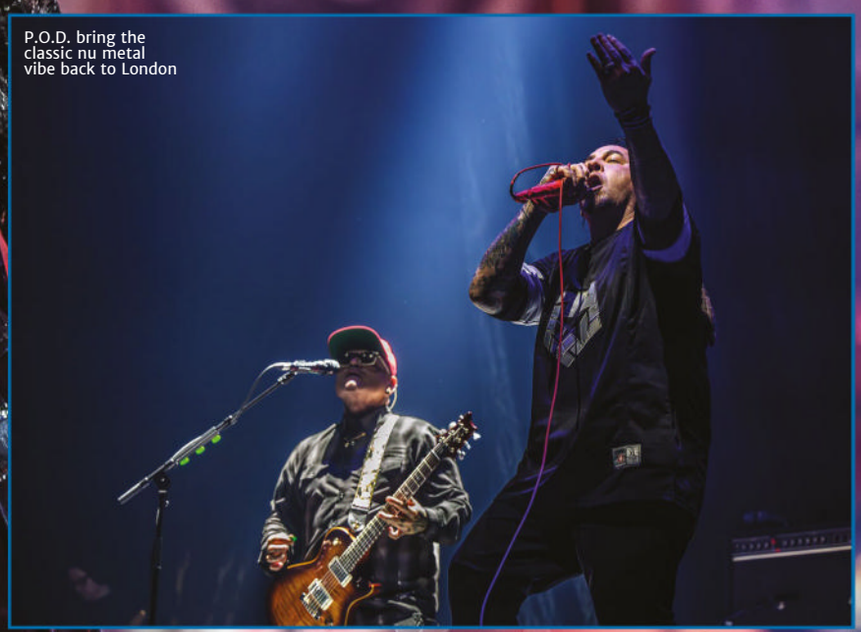
If 2023 was the year that catapulted **SKINDRED** into the upper echelons of stardom thanks to TikTok virality and a No.2 album, then 2024 is the year they celebrate their victory, with a MOBO Best Alternative award and a status-affirming headline show. To a flurry of ticker tape, *Set Fazers* and *Pressure* kick off the show, and in usual Benji Webbe style the frontman tells the audience to "fuck off" when they're not loud enough. Benji's sharp-tongued charisma is undeniable, and his connection with fans old and new is the driving force in Skindred's success.

In a moment of stark honesty, the frontman tells us about his son's battle with alcohol, before launching into an emotionally charged *Life That's Free*. Moments before, we're smashing cascading beach balls in the air to *L.O.V.E. (Smile Please)* and bopping to a dubstep remix of The Proclaimers' smash *I'm Gonna Be (500 Miles)*. It's a rollercoaster.

As the night rolls on, Skindred dive into the hits from 2023's *Smile* with *If I Could* eclipsing everything else on offer. The track's huge riffs, grooving basslines and made-for-radio chorus have the arena in the palm of their hand. Keeping the momentum going with *Nobody* and *Gimme That Boom*, the pit is at full pelt, and when *Our Religion* swings round, the sweaty masses have busted out a rowboat mosh. It's a sight to behold, but nothing compares to an arena full of Skindred fans, shirts aloft, doing the Newport Helicopter to the closing ragga metal anthem, *Warning*. That Sonny Sandoval joins Skindred onstage for this most auspicious of moments is the icing on the cake for a night that can only be described as joyous.

HOLLY WRIGHT

Skindred's Benji Webbe is the hero we need right now



P.O.D. bring the classic nu metal vibe back to London

KEVIN NIXON

CYNIC
OBSCURA / CRYPTOSIS
UNDERWORLD, LONDON

Opening up is often a thankless task, but thankfully for **CRYPTOSIS** there's a near-full house for an impressive display of Voivod-meets-latter-day Kreator thrashing that hits the spot. Germany's **OBSCURA** return a mere four months after their sell-out tour with Decapitated, and it's fair to say they're still on a high. This is a band that can *really* play, and they are clearly having a ball doing so, with the swagger of a group that have put the work in and are reaping the widdly rewards. From the fretless bass intro of *Forsaken* to the epic *When Stars Collide*, the quartet are a fearsome prospect. Thirty years on from their first UK appearance at the legendary Marquee club, **CYNIC** are still unmatched. They're massively influential on a whole host of technical metal bands, but no one has ever sounded like them. Playing 1993's masterpiece *Focus* in full proves an otherworldly experience. Music so complex and difficult rarely hits quite this powerfully; from the astonishing *Veil Of Maya* to *How Could I*, the band are flawless. The beautiful ballad *Integral* is offered as a tribute to their late, much-missed bandmates, Sean Reinert and Sean Malone. Closing with *Evolutionary Sleeper*, Cynic are nothing but astonishing.

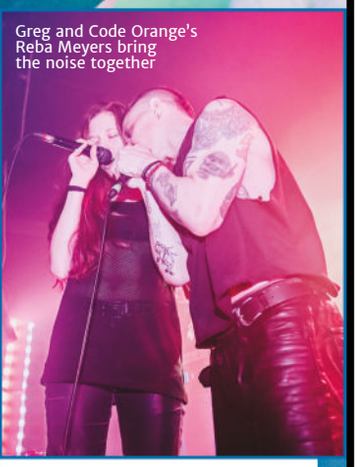
ALASTAIR RIDDELL

NAPALM DEATH
PIG DESTROYER / PRIMITIVE MAN / WORMROT
ELECTRIC BRIXTON, LONDON

With a simple drum set-up, one guitar and vocals, **WORMROT** are as tight and taught as grindcore gets. What they lack in low-end they more than make up with a varied approach to the subgenre that makes them weirdly accessible. **PRIMITIVE MAN** are the odd men out tonight, dealing more in skull-crushing doom than death-by-a-thousand-cuts grindcore. Variety should be encouraged, particularly on heavy bills, but after Wormrot's stunning display of power, the trio appear… well, primitive. **PIG DESTROYER** don't waste a second of their allotted stage time, playing 22 songs in 45 minutes. Technically dazzling and sonically savage, the Virginia legends play a set that would have made their former noise/sample man Blake Harrison, who tragically passed a few days after this show, proud. Most bands would falter after a set that brutal, but then most bands aren't **NAPALM DEATH**. Broadly starting with their lengthier death metal-inspired material before inflicting the putrid bursts of short, sharp, savage earlier cuts gives the set momentum, with the Brummie legends cherry-picking songs from their career that all sound like classics. The pioneers remain untouchable.

REMFRY DEDMAN

Greg Puciato gives The Garage a shot of adrenaline



Greg and Code Orange's Reba Meyers bring the noise together

GREG PUCIATO

TRACE AMOUNT / TAYNE

THE GARAGE, LONDON

Ex-Dillinger figurehead brings a bitter pill to his synth-metal party

GREG PUCIATO HAS always been one of metal's great mavericks. As frontman of The Dillinger Escape Plan – who split in 2017, then shockingly announced three reunion shows without him last year – he was famed for his distinct delivery and outrageous stage antics. As a solo act, with 2020's *Child Soldier: Creator Of God*, 2022's *Mirrorcell* and this year's *FC5N* EP, he's ventured from mathcore to synthy, genre-splicing rock. And the bill he's amassed for his 2024 UK tour reflects that eclectic vision.

Commencing the night are local lads **TAYNE**, whose concussive metal/shoegaze blend is lusciously mixed and backed by a stunning light show, resulting in an ear-pricking, promising set. The same can't be said for **TRACE AMOUNT**. In indulgent music jargon, the project is a one-man experimental noise outlet for Brooklyn musician Brandon Gallagher; in much more literal terms, it's a bloke shouting over an industrial backing tape for 45 minutes. The Garage is stilled by a paralytic combination of second-hand embarrassment and boredom, as each 'song' blends in with the next, all of them flaunting the idiosyncrasy of grains of rice.

Mercifully, **GREG PUCIATO** shoots London with enough adrenaline to wake it from its daze. New song *Force Fed* and *Mirrorcell* cut *Reality Spiral* kickstart the set with a swift yet graceful one-two punch. While the pair demonstrate some more accessible and dream-like moments when compared with Dillinger, they're still intense, Greg's band sharply transitioning between them without a moment's pause. It's a trend that continues through following songs *Do You Need Me To Remind You?* and *Absence As A Presence*, both much more hard-rocking.

As a result, these 90 minutes are a wall of sublime noise, inspiring a response so passionate that Greg elects to play a string of surprise songs at the night's end. Excitingly, he's joined by Code Orange's Reba Meyers, who sings her parts on *Lowered*. Disappointingly, he then covers *The Reason They Hate Me* by Daughters. It's ostensibly a nod to the fact Greg's live guitarist, Nicholas Sadler, used to be in that band, but given they folded after frontman Alexis Marshall was accused of abuse – something he has denied – and given today is International Women's Day, the mood grows uncomfortable. Although a closing cover of Alice In Chains' *Them Bones* rebuilds some momentum, the confusion and disappointment many onlookers still feel is audible as they shuffle out into the streets of the capital.

MATT MILLS

KNOCKED LOOSE

DEAFHEAVEN / HEADBUSSA

FORUM, KENTISH TOWN

Parisians **HEADBUSSA** play a particularly brutish strain of metallic hardcore, bringing out a bevy of guests including Knocked Loose's Isaac Hale for a chaotic start to the night. **DEAFHEAVEN**'s swathes of black metal laced with shimmering shoegaze and post-rock offer a stark contrast, although *Dream House* sees surfers sailing over the barrier during its stunning climax. It's a captivating display from the quintet, whose ear for tortured melody remains unmatched. The roars that erupt for **KNOCKED LOOSE** are deafening as they tear into *Deep In The Willow* and a pit swallows the floor. Its *'Knocked Loose, motherfucker!'* mosh call echoes from thousands of throats, before *Where Light Divides The Holler* decimates the pit once more. Proof a band can get big and still get heavier and weirder, Knocked Loose have firmly reached new levels of brilliance. Breakdowns hit with bone-shattering force while vocalist Bryan Garris commands the crowd to ever more vicious pits. They too bring out a few guests, including Static Dress's Olli Appleyard for *Billy No Mates*. Tonight feels truly special for the Kentuckians, affirming their spot as a vital, creative force at the forefront of modern hardcore.

WILL MARSHALL

ORBIT CULTURE

DEFECTS

REBELLION, MANCHESTER

Following a chaotic and sweaty warm-up from **DEFECTS**, who marry elements of classic and modern metalcore to great effect, **ORBIT CULTURE** descend on a sold-out Rebellion. Having formerly shared much larger venues with Trivium and In Flames, the Swedish melodic death metallers haven't dialled down the production for this intimate affair. Strobes flash from the lighting rig and jets of dry ice engulf the venue, which remains an almost constant circle-pit from the opening notes of *Black Mountain*. Vocalist Niklas Karlsson commands the audience from the outset, with crowdsurfers doing laps of the venue, joined by the band's photographer in a frantic attempt to collect visual memoirs. The anthemic chorus of *From The Inside* bounces from the walls as everyone yells in unison with Niklas. Orbit Culture don't rewrite the melodeath genre, but they've mastered their craft, with thundering bass and pounding drums holding the collective in unison as distorted and clean guitars intertwine. Their full-throttle approach is slowed only temporarily to make space for melodic riffs and emotive, singalong choruses. For a debut headline UK tour, Orbit Culture have nailed every aspect of the formula.

CHERI FAULKNER

BEN GIBSON

Enslaved and Jo Quail engage in a cultural exchange

ENSLAVED

SVALBARD / WAYFARER

ISLINGTON ASSEMBLY HALL, LONDON

Norway's boundary-blurring Vikings show their true blend of colours

ENSLAVED HAVE LONG claimed that they are not a black metal band. Guitarist/songwriter Ivar Bjørnson and lead singer/bassist Grutle Kjellson may been mentored by the late Mayhem leader Euronymous, but the Bergen band ventured away from the genre's stereotypes, dabbling in prog and krautrock. It's apt, then, that the Viking metallers have corralled two similarly style-smashing supports.

WAYFARER bring extreme metal in line with the sound of spaghetti westerns. From opener *The Thousand Tombs Of Western Promise*, the Colorado quartet play twanging guitar lines fresh from an Ennio Morricone score, casting them against distortion, cavernous roars and mid-paced percussion. Islington Assembly Hall is decently full for this set as well, so expect these visionaries to headline a UK bill soon.

SVALBARD pepper black metal with flavours of shoegaze, post-metal and hardcore. The Bristolians also offer plenty of sensitivity, Serena Cherry singing about mental health while the guitars flaunt a shimmering tone. Tonight, though, a muddy mix hampers much of that beauty. This makes all-metal ragers like *Faking It* and *Eternal Spirits* the clear highlights of the set, despite Serena's delicate and affecting vocals during *Open Wound*.

ENSLAVED's sonic diversity is reflected by the audience that gathers for their headline performance. For every attendee in a Venom t-shirt, there's another representing Devin Townsend or Porcupine Tree. That prog/extreme metal clash becomes sonic as the band arrive and burst into *Kingdom*. A single from last year's *Heimdal* album, its whirring thrash riff is accompanied by Grutle joining Håkon Vinje on wobbling synths, before the track plummets from snarled verses to melodic choruses, courtesy of drummer/backing singer Iver Sandøy. All the while, the venue's spotlights flash like rapid-fire Morse code messages.

Another *Heimdal* standout, *Congelia*, has its extreme metal riff contrasted by the stabbing cello of guest performer Jo Quail. Then, Enslaved steer their longship to more nostalgic territory. *Frost/Loke*, now 30 years old, declare the band's roots in the Norwegian black metal scene, drums galloping forth as Ivar and lead guitarist Ice Dale tremolo-pick for their lives. *Havenless* is replete with that famously burly Viking chant and *Isa* subsequently stomps along for four minutes, employing its slick call-and-answer chorus.

A closing *Allfoðr Oðinn* again threads Enslaved's dual needles, progressively contorting black metal riffs for seven ambitious minutes. It's a conclusion that reiterates how well this band balance brutality and intricacy. Three decades since they debuted, their approach still feels fresh.

MATT MILLS

Not everything is rosy on the night for Svalbard's Serena Cherry

WILL IRELAND

Botch make a stunning last stand in the UK

BOTCH

GREAT FALLS / BAD BREEDING

ELECTRIC BALLROOM, LONDON

Washington State's cult mathcore crew return for one last stand

Bad Breeding: agents of chaos

THE LAST TIME Tacoma, Washington-based mathcore legends Botch played London, they supported The Dillinger Escape Plan at the Underworld. In their original incarnation, Botch were severely underappreciated – a fact they were well aware of, and one that was almost certainly a contributing factor to their split in 2002. Since then, their music's been rightly heralded as a schematic for countless bands seeking to stretch the boundaries of ferociously heavy music.

Despite being routinely dismissed as a pipe dream by members of the band for years, a reunion has been a long time coming, and the feeling of fervent anticipation in the never-more-aptly-named Electric Ballroom is palpable.

Before a bunch of sweaty millennials proceed to have their minds blown and prayers answered, **BAD BREEDING** enthusiastically peel out an endearingly ramshackle set of songs as equally inspired by UK punk legends The Exploited as they are Converge. They get a polite response from a crowd more enthusiastic for **GREAT FALLS**, a disorientating mix of noise, doom and hardcore that shares more avant-garde DNA with the headliners.

BOTCH immediately sound *immense* as they steamroll into their signature song, *To Our Friends In The Great White North*, chucking it out early like absolute bosses. They're jaw-droppingly precise – a quality not even the most diehard fan would have anticipated in the 22 years since they split, given how furiously chaotic the band's music is. *Oma*, a discordantly abrasive number by anyone's standards, is crystal clear, even as the song melts before our ears into an awe-inspiring symphony of swelling guitar notes and stirring piano courtesy of drummer Tim Latona.

Few bands would have the chutzpah to play the predominantly piano-led *Afghamistam* live, fearing that it might derail the set, but Botch realise songs such as these are a vital part of their legacy, and this reunion is all about celebrating that. Vocalist Dave Verellen makes it clear that this will be the last time the band ever play London, but that seems apt. Botch prove tonight that their legacy is special, not a commodity to be wheeled out every five years or so by a band whose motivation is gradually waning. This is sacred and, if you were there, you were one of the lucky ones.

REMFRY DEDMAN

AUGUST BURNS RED

DYING WISH / THROWN

O2 RITZ, MANCHESTER

The fans filing into the Ritz know exactly what to expect: flip-flops and metalcore. An August Burns Red performance wouldn't be the same without the constant fear of guitarist J.B. Brubaker tripping over in the midst of his killer riffs, but when you've been around for 20 years, not much comes as a surprise. Openers **THROWN** serve up a frazzling assault of industrial-tinged hardcore, their raw surge of sound vibrating through the venue floor. **DYING WISH** frontwoman Emma Boster has the ability to shift between angelic chanteuse and guttural goblin in a flash, as the crowd delight in the band's ferocious metallic hardcore. When **AUGUST BURNS RED** finally appear to the epic blare of *Empire*, the Pennsylvanians sound incredible – Jake Luhrs is one of the cleanest-sounding frontmen in metalcore – but compared to the scrappy, unpredictable hardcore of the supports, the band feel tame. Dying Wish had rampant circle-pits, but August Burns Red practically have to beg for movement. They sound as strong as ever, and *Defender* certainly wakes the masses, but it's by the book. After two decades, there's a need for some excitement to bring the flame back to life.

EMILY SWINGLE

CRYPTOPSY

ATHEIST

THE UNDERWORLD, LONDON

1990 was a very special year for death metal, not least thanks to Florida masters **ATHEIST**. Their *Piece Of Time* album remains one of the high-water marks of the genre, and it's criminal that they've never reached UK shores until now. Time clearly hasn't dulled their edge, and, as they open with *No Truth*, it's clear the fire still burns. Kelly Shaefer no longer plays guitar, but his voice remains magical, and he's managed to recruit a young band of gifted players to do justice to the savagery of *On They Slay* and *Unholy War*, as well as the trailblazing, jazz-inflected sounds of *Air, Unquestionable Presence* and *Mother Man*. Quite simply stunning. Canadian monsters **CRYPTOPSY** are 30 years on from their debut album, *Blasphemy Made Flesh*, and drum legend Flo Mounier is here to bring the firepower, although almost half the set is culled from 1996's *None So Vile*. They sound like a Gatling gun mounted atop an armour-plated elephant, while windmilling vocalist Matt McGachy boasts the vocal cords of a rutting moose and neck muscles to put a Formula 1 driver to shame. The whole is an unrelenting assault on the senses, which is what everyone's paid their money for.

ALASTAIR RIDDELL

BEN GIBSON

DRAGONFORCE / AMARANTHE

INFECTED RAIN

ROUNDHOUSE, LONDON

Fromage-infused metallers lead a dual assault on the senses

CHEESE FANATICS ARE dining well tonight, as a co-headlining bill of pop metallers Amaranthe and gloriously overblown extreme power metallers Dragonforce rolls into town. It falls to groove metal outfit **INFECTED RAIN** to open the night, as punters are still filing in from the mammoth queue snaking a significant distance down Chalk Farm Road. The stage is a whirlwind of dreadlocks. Vocalist Lena Scissorhands is a formidable presence, as she commands mass fist-pumping and swathes of crowdsurfers. It's the Moldovans' first time in the UK in five years, and the deafening reception suggests the wait won't be as long again.

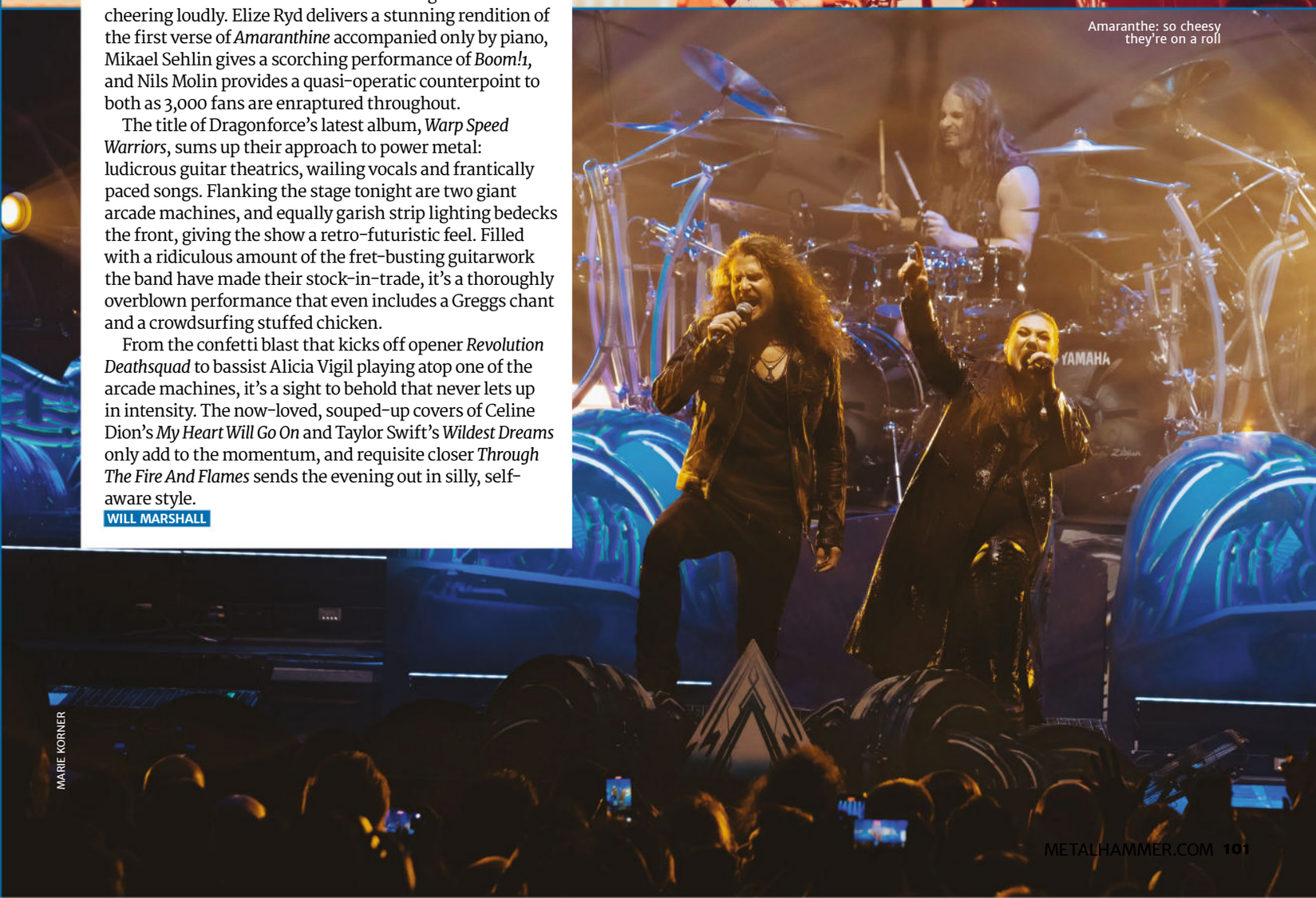
AMARANTHE open with a euphoric *Fearless* and the pulsating dance metal of *Viral*. The production includes smoke jets and lasers to accompany *Digital World*, while *Damnation Flame* sees the stage bathed in appropriately hellish red and orange strip lights. Amaranthe stuff their co-headlining slot with electronic-infused anthems that make full use of their trio of vocalists and get the crowd cheering loudly. Elize Ryd delivers a stunning rendition of the first verse of *Amaranthine* accompanied only by piano, Mikael Sehlin gives a scorching performance of *Boom!1*, and Nils Molin provides a quasi-operatic counterpoint to both as 3,000 fans are enraptured throughout.

The title of Dragonforce's latest album, *Warp Speed Warriors*, sums up their approach to power metal: ludicrous guitar theatrics, wailing vocals and frantically paced songs. Flanking the stage tonight are two giant arcade machines, and equally garish strip lighting bedecks the front, giving the show a retro-futuristic feel. Filled with a ridiculous amount of the fret-busting guitarwork the band have made their stock-in-trade, it's a thoroughly overblown performance that even includes a Greggs chant and a crowdsurfing stuffed chicken.

From the confetti blast that kicks off opener *Revolution Deathsquad* to bassist Alicia Vigil playing atop one of the arcade machines, it's a sight to behold that never lets up in intensity. The now-loved, souped-up covers of Celine Dion's *My Heart Will Go On* and Taylor Swift's *Wildest Dreams* only add to the momentum, and requisite closer *Through The Fire And Flames* sends the evening out in silly, self-aware style.

WILL MARSHALL

Dragonforce: sorted for cheese and whizz



Amaranthe: so cheesy they're on a roll

MARIE KORNER

VUKOVI

KNIFE BRIDE / ANKOR

ELECTRIC BALLROOM, LONDON

Scotland's pop-infused metallers bring North London to the boil

AN INTERNATIONAL QUINTET based in the Catalonia region, **ANKOR** quickly set the incendiary tone for the evening with their explosive single, *Darkbeat*. This is only their second London show to date, and the band make the most of it with an arsenal of hellish screams, heavy-hitting breakdowns and anthemic alt rock choruses, even throwing in a drum solo and an encore.

A pulsating intro silences the chatter in the room as Brighton's **KNIFE BRIDE** arrive onstage. Ramping up the hype levels, they put on a captivating display with gnarly guitar shredding and spellbinding vocals. Guitarist Sean Windle and bassist Craig Glynn headbang in sync, while frontwoman Mollie Buckley dances along the stage. "Keep that fucking energy up!" screams Sean as moshpits erupt, before a cut-throat *Fang Dummy* and melodic rock offering *Permanent Smile* bring their set to a shattering close.

The anticipation in the room skyrockets as **VUKOVI** make their entrance, tonight playing third album *Nula* in full. *Departure* makes for an atmospheric introduction, while the mammoth grooves of *Tainted* send the band into orbit, as Janine Shilstone's serpentine vocals veer between states of abandon and control. Then there's the massive *Lasso*, starting with *that* 'oops'. There's a cinematic scope to the band's sound that keeps fans starting pit after pit, and everyone booms the words "Here we fucking go" as they eagerly await the next song.

This a celebration, and the crowd cheers Janine on as she cracks open a bottle of Buckfast, before going into the captivating *Slo*. Even during the emotionally devastating *Sad*, with Janine appropriately bathed in blue lights, a man is hoisted above the crowd and manages to stand up as they support him by his ankles, prompting her to giggle. "Keep him up!", she bellows, later adding, "Thank you for the guy that just stole my show."

After *Nula*, Vukovi play a handful more songs, including last year's slick *Creep Heat* and *Mercy Kill*, Janine wrapping herself in a Scottish flag and even signing vinyl for someone down the front. As their triumphant show comes to an end, she gives thanks to their crew, management and the audience. It's a moment of genuine humility, from a band driving heavy music into exhilarating new emotional and sonic pastures.

LAVIEA THOMAS

Knife Bride set the Ballroom ablaze

Vukovi: Janine Shilstone reaches fever pitch

DEREK BREMNER

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ALT BLK ERA bring a wrecking ball to Brixton

JAKE OWENS

ALT BLK ERA

HOOTANANNY, LONDON

Alt metal renegades bring their raw energy to Brixton

ON A MINISCULE stage in Brixton, the new generation of alternative artists are defiantly ripping up the rulebook in front of our eyes, and it's glorious. Donning black and white gothic Lolita-style outfits and admitting that they'd never heard of Slipknot before their drummer introduced them (this tidbit is met with a distinct *lack* of pearl-clutching) – the sister duo of **ALT BLK ERA** are utterly, endearingly authentic, and genuinely exciting.

Nyrobi and Chaya have more than just youthful exuberance on their side. Coming from a generation that is, arguably, far more fluid in its self-expression than its predecessors, it's no surprise that the young pair are comfortable not just playing with genre but smashing it to pieces, which they do with panache. Drawing largely on the *Freak Show* EP, the girls create a warmly inclusive atmosphere among the diverse crowd tonight with their misfit anthems that oscillate between what they refer to as the 'solar' and 'lunar' facets of their sound – a kind of yin-and-yang of light and dark qualities. Chaya's delicate siren voice stuns on the titular track off the EP, while Nyrobi's full-throated, furious rapping is the cherry on top of the brilliant *Obsession : Solar.* An Arctic Monkeys mash-up at double-speed is a lot of fun – and it's very kind of them to throw a bone to the over-30s, of which there are but a few – and they engage their crowd naturally in a call and response during *Oggy*, of, you guessed it: "Oggy Oggy Oggy!" "Oi Oi Oi!"

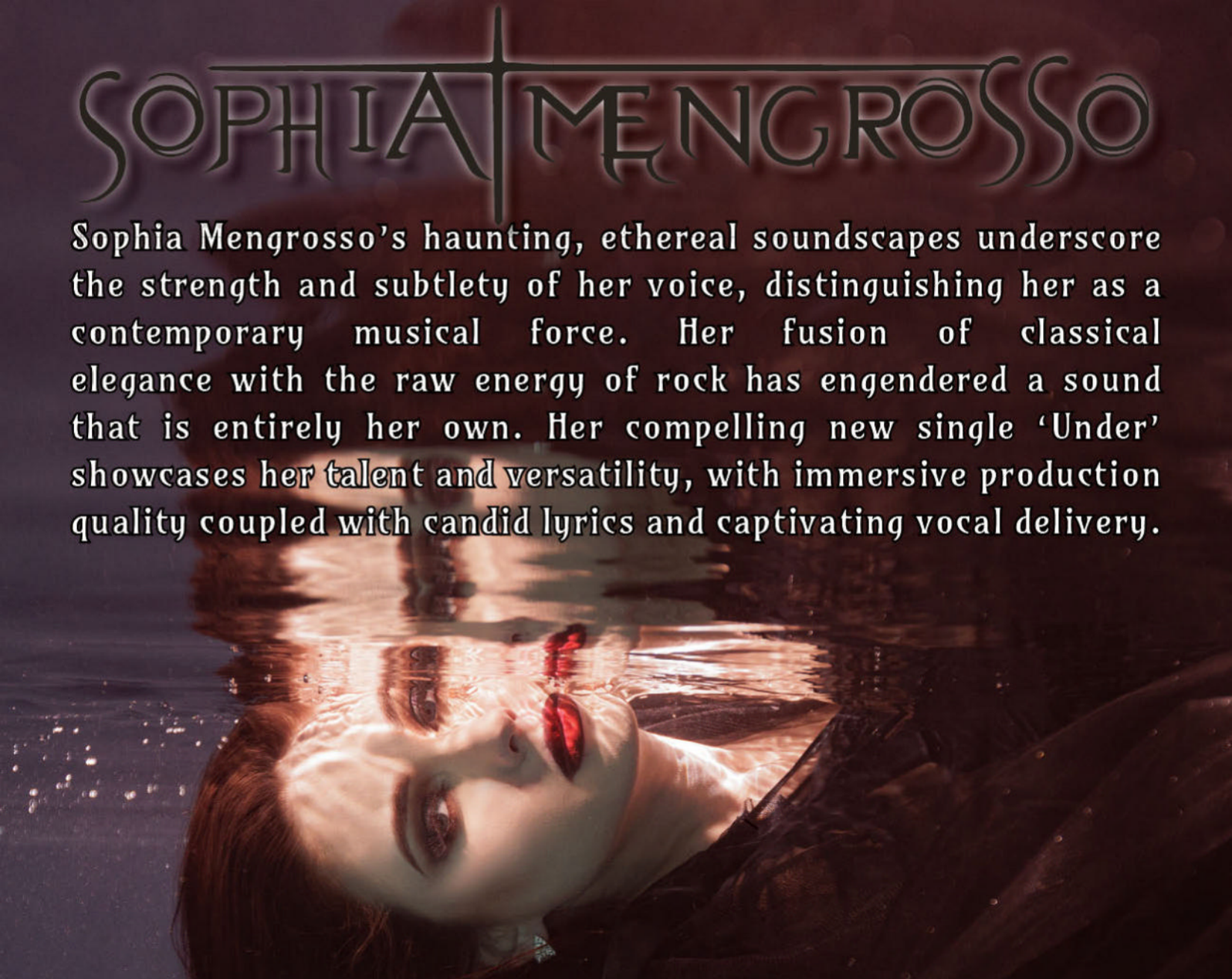
The duo play off each other with the kind of easy back and forth that only close sisters could have, and a professionalism that belies their age and experience. Which is not to say that they're overly polished – they're raucous, joyful and fun, and are throwing everything they've got at tonight. The evening culminates in an energetic performance of *I'm Normally Like This*, the gleefully insolent and infectious single, with middle fingers raised and giant black and white balloons being bopped around.

It's thrilling to catch a young band at this stage of their burgeoning career, on the cusp of a well-earned breakthrough. They're ushering in a new era of alternative music, and it can't come soon enough.

CATHERINE MORRIS

SOPHIA MENGROSSO

Sophia Mengrosso's haunting, ethereal soundscapes underscore the strength and subtlety of her voice, distinguishing her as a contemporary musical force. Her fusion of classical elegance with the raw energy of rock has engendered a sound that is entirely her own. Her compelling new single 'Under' showcases her talent and versatility, with immersive production quality coupled with candid lyrics and captivating vocal delivery.



Sophia's upcoming album 'Unforgiven' will further explore the emotional depths she has so skillfully crafted. Her live shows and festival appearances are always highly anticipated, offering audiences a chance to fully engage with her unique musical narrative.

sophia_mengrosso

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FIVE MINUTES WITH

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ICE NINE KILLS

The horror-loving frontman talks Kurt Cobain cosplay, Halloween plans and the idea of a *Silver Scream 3*

WORDS: MATT MILLS

You've cosplayed a lot throughout your career, but apparently the first time you tried, it was a bit different. Didn't you basically want to be Kurt Cobain when you were a kid?
"Yeah, he was one of my absolute first idols. I saw the video for *Smells Like Teen Spirit* on MTV and it changed everything for me. The music, the look – it made me want to want to buy a guitar and learn how to play all of Nirvana's songs."

Didn't you even dye your hair to look like Kurt?
"I did! I grew my hair long and dyed the front of it blond, I wore flannel shirts, and I bought any Nirvana shirt I could get my hands on. But I was so young – seven, eight years old – that none of the shirts fit me. They all went down to my knees."

What's the cosplay costume you're proudest of?
"I'd say I like the deep cuts: films that aren't as well known as, say, *Friday The 13th*. I had always wanted to cosplay as Devon Sawa's character, Anton Tobias, from [1999 horror comedy] *Idle Hands*. Last October I think I really nailed it, including the inhaler necklace that he wears, which is actually just a marijuana pipe."

That film had a stacked punk and metal soundtrack. Is there a franchise or director you'd love to do a soundtrack for?
"*Halloween*. John Carpenter's score is so iconic, yet so minimal. It'd be fun to tackle that. From what I understand, John Carpenter scored that film in three days with one synthesiser."

Horror films notwithstanding, what scares you the most?
"I guess it's the things that scare everybody, you know? Death of family members, losing anyone you love. But, to be honest, nothing in the horror world really scares me that much. I miss the feeling that I got when I was a little kid, when I'd be so scared that I'd think Jason [Voorhees] or Michael [Myers] was in my closet or under the bed."

"I WAS SCARED THAT JASON VOORHEES OR MICHAEL MYERS WAS IN MY CLOSET OR UNDER THE BED"

When was the last time a film truly got under your skin in that way?
"Some of those *Paranormal Activity* movies were very scary, especially the first one, just because it seemed so real. I really respect a movie like that for being able to do so much with such a limited budget."

You've made two *Silver Scream* albums. Will there be a third?
"At some point, it will probably be on the horizon. We'll see. I can't talk too much about what we're doing right now."

Whatever INK do next, do you think it's going to be *The Silver Scream 3*? Or would you do something else first?
"I don't know yet; time will tell, man! But we are working on new music and it's turning out incredible. We're sort of in the demo stage now, but everything is really exciting. I think people are going to be very excited about what comes next."

What does what you're demoing sound like?
"You're not gonna get an answer out of me, dude. Ha ha ha!"

It's only spring but, as a horror fanatic, you must already have plans for Halloween this year…
"I actually do! It's funny because, last year, I'd just moved into a new house and I wanted to throw a Halloween party. I brainstormed this idea of renting out this big, outdoor-screen theatre, and we put it on the lawn! The company brought a popcorn machine and we hired a taco truck, so we had this really cool Halloween outside my house and invited a bunch of friends and some of my favourite actors. It was just a great experience! I'm going to try and keep up that tradition for as long as I can: hosting a party at my house."

Will cosplaying be mandatory?
"No, but if you want to wear a costume, that's great! Come as you are."

It's great that we opened our chat with a Kurt Cobain question, and finished by name-dropping a Nirvana song.
"I didn't realise I did that! Ha ha ha!"

***THE SILVER SCREAM 2: WELCOME TO HORRORWOOD* IS OUT NOW VIA FEARLESS. ICE NINE KILLS TOUR THE UK FROM MAY 22**

JEREMY SAFFER

THE UNDERWORLD

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